

Community of Christ

THE PRIESTHOOD MANUAL

2004 Edition

Herald Publishing House  
Independence, Missouri

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# Foreword

This manual is a basic resource for priesthood members in the Community of Christ. It is one of the important books that are standard works for all who share in church leadership responsibilities.

Periodically this manual is revised and updated. It was almost completely rewritten in 1982, then revised and enlarged in 1985 and 1990. The current edition has many new sections as well as a general reworking of previously included chapters.

Clifford A. Cole, former president of the Council of Twelve and an appointee minister for more than thirty years, was author and editor of the 1985 manual. Richard A. Brown, book editor at Herald House, further revised this manual using Clifford Cole's text in 1990.

This new edition of *The Priesthood Manual* is the product of collaboration by members of the World Church Leadership Council as well as several other World Church ministers who serve at church headquarters and in specialized responsibilities in the field. It maintains many parts of the original work done by Apostle Cole and Brother Brown, supplemented by new and revised chapters written by numerous authors. Apostle Leonard M. Young was the project manager, and Brother Brown once again functioned as general editor.

Because the nature of local congregational organization continues to change according to need, this book will not attempt to describe in detail the method by which local congregations should be organized. Such information can be found in other church publications such as the *Congregational Leaders Handbook* and the *Church Administrator's Handbook*.

This material is a vital reference for all who share in priesthood responsibilities. It is intended to help new priesthood members and well-experienced ones offer effective ministry.

The First Presidency  
W. Grant McMurray  
Kenneth N. Robinson  
Peter A. Judd



# Contents

## Foreword

### Part One

Chapter 1:	The Nature of Priesthood .....	9
Chapter 2:	Priesthood Structure .....	19
Chapter 3:	Melchisedec Ministry: Mission and Vision.....	29
Chapter 4:	Aaronic Ministers: A Ministry of Presence .....	39
Chapter 5:	Priesthood Accountability and Discipleship.....	47
Chapter 6:	The Path of the Disciple .....	55
Chapter 7:	Sharing Your Witness and Resources .....	63
Chapter 8:	Generosity .....	73
Chapter 9:	Historical Development.....	81
Chapter 10:	Authority .....	91
Chapter 11:	Ministerial Ethics .....	101
Chapter 12:	Administrative, Legislative, and Judicial Functions .....	111
Chapter 13:	Priesthood Calls.....	121
Chapter 14:	The Pastor's Role in Priesthood Calls.....	127

### Part Two

Chapter 15:	Worship in the Life of the Church .....	149
Chapter 16:	Preaching Ministry.....	159
Chapter 17:	Leading the Prayer and Fellowship Service .....	167
Chapter 18:	Celebrating the Sacraments .....	177
Chapter 19:	The Baptismal Service .....	183
Chapter 20:	The Confirmation Service.....	191
Chapter 21:	The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper .....	195

Chapter 22:	The Blessing of Children .....	201
Chapter 23:	Ordination.....	205
Chapter 24:	The Evangelist's Blessing .....	209
Chapter 25:	The Sacrament of Marriage .....	215
Chapter 26:	Marriage Preparation and Planning.....	227
Chapter 27:	Laying on of Hands for the Sick...	241
Chapter 28:	Visiting the Ill.....	247
Chapter 29:	The Funeral Service .....	251
Chapter 30:	Home Ministry.....	257

# **Part One**



## **Chapter 1**

# **The Nature of Priesthood**

### **Discipleship, Ministry, and Priesthood**

Discipleship is the fundamental call to all Christians. The only real reason for the church to exist is to embody the ministries of Jesus in our own time and place. Because of that the church is known as the body of Christ. Each member is considered a follower, or disciple, of Jesus. To be a disciple is the most basic and important element of our Christian identity.

Ministry also has a universal dimension to it in that all of us who would be disciples of Jesus are called into service. Sometimes ministry is thought to be something done only by those who are ordained. But the Christian faith as understood by the Community of Christ invites all members to be ministers. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told, “All are called according to the gifts of God unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 119:8b). This is a statement about both the affairs of the church (each person has a ministry to bring) and those of the world (our Christian witness extends to all aspects of life).

Priesthood is a particular expression of that more universal ministry to which we are all called. Many of the specialized functions in the church are carried out by priesthood members, those ordained to a particular type of ministry. Divine calling to special functions emphasizes the involvement of God in all aspects of life. It is a match between the needs of the church and the gifts and commitments of some of its members. God is concerned about all of life and is involved with us in every part of our experience.

## **Calling and Acceptance of Calling**

Every human organization has people who perform certain special functions. These functions are necessary to help the group be united in its purposes, mobilize and use its resources effectively, carry out its decisions, and meet the needs of its members. In order for the group to function smoothly without internal conflict, it is important for the people who perform these functions to understand their roles and be accepted by the group. When the members of a group have well-defined roles and sense the unique contribution they can make, the entire body benefits. Likewise, one's own sense of personal ministry is thereby acknowledged, bringing fulfillment in service.

In the Community of Christ priesthood responsibilities involve a sense of calling on the part of the priesthood member and acceptance of that calling by the people who will be served. This same principle pertains to every priesthood office at every level of church life. The calling is discerned by the church officer responsible for initiating priesthood calls, usually the pastor of a congregation. After appropriate approvals have been received the call is presented to the individual for a personal decision. It is then submitted to a conference for approval by the people. This process honors the place of personal calling and also acknowledges the rights of those who will be the recipients of the ordained ministry.

## **Ordination and Vocation**

Our church holds to the belief that all of life is sacred. There are no areas in which God is not present. God joins with us in our organizations and activities as the One who creates and loves us. God calls us to share in the divine purpose. This, to some extent, accounts for the wide range of ministries inherent in the several orders and offices of the priesthood. The church recognizes in its priesthood structure that activities considered by many to be secular have a ministerial dimension.

Part of this is caught up in the notion of vocation. We recognize that ministry also occurs in the workplace, where

teachers touch the lives of children, or factory workers labor alongside friends in need, or business people work ethically and responsibly as members of society. Such expressions of ministry do not require ordination, but emerge naturally from the heart of a disciple.

Every disciple should sense the call of God to represent Christian principles in all of life. Some will sense a call to unique and specialized ministries within the life of the church. These are the ministerial functions that involve ordination.

## **Priesthood Roles in the Congregation**

Roles in society are undergoing changes and new understandings. This is also true of priesthood. Today we recognize that many functions once thought to be only the province of priesthood can be performed by various persons, whether ordained or unordained. This is an acknowledgement of our central understanding of ministry as all of us doing the work of Jesus in the world. Most people want to contribute to the church in whatever ways they can through their giftedness and in accordance with their commitment.

While this manual deals with the ministry of priesthood, its principles apply to all who would be disciples of Jesus Christ. Both the ordained and unordained share in the work of God and may perform ministries of great value to the church and its members. It is primarily in administering the ordinances and sacraments of the church and in some presiding functions that those in the priesthood have exclusive roles that cannot be performed in the church by anyone else. More important than the question of what one can or can't do is the question of what one *feels called* to do and is willing to accept responsibility for in the life of the church.

## **The Origin of Priesthood**

Priesthood has its origin in Jesus Christ. In Christ we see God ministering to the human race and humans responding to God's ministry. According to scripture, "For in him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus has revealed the full response of our humanness to the divine

will. He lived out in practice the meaning of his prayer in Gethsemane, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:36 IV).

In the Restoration movement we sometimes speak of the priesthood as having been “restored” at the time the church was founded. This emerged from a belief in that time that the churches had gone astray and that the power of ministry had been lost. While the extent to which that is true may be argued, it is our faith that something sacred and authoritative happened when our church was founded. We continue to embrace the spirit of that experience now. It is not about rejecting other churches or their ministries. Instead, the key principle is our belief that God blesses us in our ministry when we faithfully respond and serve. The effectiveness of our priesthood is never based on some historic event from another era but on the spiritual vitality we exhibit in our own time.

A divine call to minister is a call to join the Lord Jesus in the continuing interpretation of the purposes of God in terms of earthly human life. In a sense, this is what it means to be prophetic. Priesthood is to give form and substance to the word of God. It is to make the word flesh in each generation so that God’s truth and will may be understood among the people. This requires our personal response to the spirit of revelation and the discipline appropriate to those who are “laborers together with God.” The church is the divinely established structure that permits human beings to relate to God and each other in effective group life.

## **Priesthood Is a Call to Service**

Priesthood is a call to serve. According to a well-known scripture passage persons do not take priesthood honor unto themselves, but are “called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4). If one’s ministry is to be effective he or she must respond to such a call humbly and with a desire to serve. Even Jesus “did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest” (Hebrews 5:5).

Those ordained must be willing to yield their lives to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Through study, experience, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit they grow in their capability to express and share this ministry with others. They must

concern themselves continually with the welfare of all people everywhere and in every condition. Priesthood members are responsible for creating conditions that contribute to the full growth and development of all people. They should be patient and long-suffering, willing to sacrifice for others. They must be able to lead people to dedicate themselves to discipleship as followers of Christ.

Both personal ministry and sacramental functions performed by priesthood members are channels of ministry. When properly administered by authorized officials the sacraments bind the church to legal provisions such as church membership, child blessing, ordination, and marriage. However, the spiritual content of these relationships is not guaranteed by the official action alone. The spiritual dimension of ministry is a gift from God but is usually a result of personal discipline, study, moral righteousness, and compassion for people, as well. These are personal elements that priesthood members must nurture and develop. Official functions should contribute to them, but cannot replace them.

Priesthood is a sacred trust, and those accepting it must account for the manner in which it is used. It is not an earthly honor, for honor's sake, not a privilege for human glory (John 7:18). It is not like an earthly bequest, controlled and administered for personal selfish interests. Priesthood is the highest conceivable kind of stewardship, involving responsibility to both God and humankind. Because this is so, no person can demand to be ordained as if it were a right.

## **Priesthood Is a Covenant**

Members of the Community of Christ have long believed that life should be lived as a stewardship. The commitment made at the time of baptism is a covenant. On our part we promise in that covenant to accept Christ as our savior and to serve him. He is our Lord. In latter-day scriptures we are told that “stewardship is the response of my people to the ministry of my Son and is required alike of all those who seek to build the kingdom” (D. and C. 147:5a).

Each of us is accountable for the investment God has made in us for divinely wise purposes. What we do with our lives is

therefore of profound importance. When we are called to the priesthood our response is a part of that stewardship. Ministerial responsibility should not be lightly accepted, and failure to function actively in the responsibilities of our priesthood office is a serious matter. Such failure violates the covenant we have made with God and the people who accepted us. Priesthood, therefore, is not accepted, rejected, or laid aside casually but requires an earnest search to know and respond to God's will.

Sometimes individuals face personal life circumstances that make it difficult for them to function for a period of time, or even require them to lay down ministerial responsibilities permanently. There are administrative procedures within the church to deal with these matters in a pastorally sensitive manner.

## **Priesthood Is a Witness of Truth**

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He is the revelation of God's intent for us. Again he said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the spirit of truth" (John 14:16–17 IV). It is important that we grow in knowledge and understanding. We are told, "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D. and C. 90:6a). It is that truth found in Jesus Christ that makes us free and whole. Jesus therefore is both our guide and the source of power that enables us to become sons and daughters of God.

Thoughtful consideration of the gospel shows, however, that our ministry is not only a call to communicate knowledge but also to be witnesses of divine grace. It is possible to dispense ideas without bringing people to God. In a real sense the priesthood member must become the embodiment of divine grace. Ministry is of the spirit as well as of knowledge. In the great crises of life, people need to know that God has really come into their lives through the ministry of those God has called.

In this sense the most valuable part of anyone's ministry is an awareness of their own life and how God has been present within it. Priesthood members are not immune from the various things that all human beings experience—doubt, despair, anger, discouragement, lack of faithfulness. Sometimes

the expectations placed on priesthood prevent them from acknowledging their own weaknesses and shortcomings. But it is in viewing those human qualities through eyes of faith, and speaking openly to others about how God's grace has blessed us, that meaningful ministry can occur. This is the essence of testimony.

The proof of ministry is not so much in argument as in its function. When John the Baptist asked, from prison, whether or not Jesus was the one "of whom it is written in the prophets that he should come," Jesus answered, "Go and tell John again of those things that ye do hear and see; how the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, and the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them" (Matthew 11:3–5 IV). The proof of the messiahship of Jesus was in his life and work. So it is with us.

## **Called to Grow**

Those in the priesthood must continue to grow in understanding and ministerial effectiveness. This means that priesthood members are to serve and are to lead others into service. They are commanded to study, to read all good books, and to do those things that will help them be prepared to serve effectively. Skill in ministry, however, will also require actual pastoral care of members of the church and nonmembers. As priesthood members seek to qualify for ministry, their training programs will often be in conjunction with actual ministry.

The church provides through Temple School and other sources various opportunities for training and education. There are some expectations for pre-ordination classes, but often the initiative for continuing education rests upon the priesthood member. Another valuable method for learning is in mentoring. It is helpful to identify someone who can serve as a mentor for new priesthood members, sharing their firsthand experience and knowledge. Pastors should explore that with new priesthood members. Where that is not provided for directly, it would be appropriate for the priesthood member to ask a trusted minister if he or she would serve in a mentoring role.

There are always ways in which we can magnify our callings through study, prayer, and service. All priesthood members should see their ministry as a work in progress.

## **Spiritual Empowerment**

Using the term “power” in relation to priesthood often leads to inappropriate or inadequate understandings. Priesthood is never about power over others but rather about the power of life emanating from God. It is manifest in the new birth by which people come to possess a higher life than they would otherwise achieve. Under this power there are times when there is a quickening of the mind to understand divine truth beyond what is usually obtainable through the physical senses. Such spiritual insight may increase one’s powers of ministry, understanding, and maturity of judgment.

Through the quickening of the Holy Spirit individuals perceive an awareness of God beyond what would otherwise be understood. Such insights strengthen one’s capacity to become a son or daughter of God, according to the promise of the scriptures (see D. and C. 50:6; 90:4). This spiritual awareness is not reserved to priesthood alone, and some people are naturally more intuitive and focused in their own spiritual disciples. But priesthood members should continue to strive for the empowerment that comes from an acceptance of God’s love and an awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in each life.

## **Ministries of Caring, Shepherding, and Teaching**

Good ministers are always keenly aware of human need and human suffering. They must be willing to help bear the burdens of humanity. One of the finest things said of Jesus was that he “went about doing good.” It is a simple model for all who represent him. But the attention and interest of ministers are not confined to the affairs of this earth; ministers must always be seeking to represent people before God, praying that the divine love and power will intercede where human power meets its limits and can go no further. They must strive to interpret God to the minds and hearts of people.

Genuine ministry, of whatever order, quorum, or office, always evidences a rich pastoral quality. The good minister is a true shepherd. The bad shepherd is one who does not feed the flock (Ezekiel 34:8). The good shepherd's life is laid down for the sheep. Jesus designated the duties of the shepherd in John 10:1–16. The shepherd provides protection and guidance, as we find illustrated in Psalm 23. It is a saving ministry. “The Son of Man came to save the lost” (Matthew 18:11).

Christ set a high standard for teaching. He had a clear concept of his purpose. He knew his material thoroughly. He was a master of technique and method. He was the living example of the truth he revealed. He was deeply devoted to those he taught (see John 10:16–17). Teaching at its best is concerned with life. Those who teach deal with living people more than with materials. They seek to understand the possibilities, meanings, limitations, and dangers of the life processes that affect the welfare of people, and use them for good purposes.

In all that we do as priesthood members we seek to emulate the life of Jesus as a sensitive pastor, attentive shepherd, and competent teacher.

## **A Great Commission**

The purpose of priesthood is to bear witness of the love of God and of the saving grace and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is called to bear the message of salvation to the world and to win people to God. The testimony it bears centers in Christ, as when the Spirit of God declared to the disciples, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew 17:4 IV). The gospel it teaches is joyous, because it is the “good news” of the kingdom of God. This gospel is universal in its power to meet human need and is for all people. The gospel must be shared with others. There is a sense of great urgency in this mission because the life of every person is short. Those who are here and have the opportunity today may not be here tomorrow. Much can happen in a little while that will affect life eternally. The soul that needs salvation needs it now.

When Jesus sent the first apostles forth he said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:17–19 IV).

While this commission was first spoken to the original apostles it speaks to every one of us. It is our commission, too. The most meaningful part of the world for us may not be in distant places. It may be in our town or on our block.

Our response to that commission puts us on the path of the disciple. It calls each of us to ministry in accordance with the gifts of God unto us. Those who are ordained give unique expression to that commission through the sacraments and ministries of the Community of Christ in its worldwide witness. It is a sacred calling, touching our deepest yearnings and worthy of our highest devotion.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Priesthood Structure**

### **A Diversity of Gifts and Callings**

Each person is different from all others. People are different in capabilities, personality, faith, talents, and personal preferences. When God calls a person into ministerial service these individual characteristics are taken into consideration.

It is generally understood that priesthood members will minister in those areas in which they are most gifted. However, priesthood members should not be satisfied to remain at their current level of personal development. They should increase their abilities and develop their neglected capacities. They should become increasingly proficient in those areas of ministry in which they are gifted. As priesthood members respond to the need for ministry in areas where they have not previously served, they may find that they are blessed with abilities and talents of which they were unaware. The principle of fruitfulness applies here just as it does in other realms of life. Often when faced with difficult situations, ministers find they have abilities that had not been previously recognized. These should be developed and used in the service of Christ.

Because there are many different callings even within the various offices of the priesthood, ministers should not become frustrated at their inability to offer all types of ministries. There are always other members of the priesthood who can minister well in areas where they cannot. Priesthood allows for a division of labor even within offices. This is good, for there is much to be done, and even members of the priesthood within one office may minister to one another because certain gifts may be given to one in more abundance than to another.

## Giftedness

Gifts of ministry differ from person to person through differing genetic qualities, environmental impact, or through whatever means God chooses to endow individuals with those qualities labeled as “gifts of God unto them.” Gifts inherent in the personality of certain church members are perceived within the church as those qualities of ministry that are appropriate for expression through priesthood ministry.

Thus the church, through its authorized representatives and formal procedures, calls to priesthood those with specific categories of ministry implied by office designation that relate to the gifts of the person who is called and ordained. Gifts and their expression are developed according to life’s circumstance, personal interest and needs, and the capability of the church to receive the varieties of ministry offered by each member.

## Calling

Individuals need to experience the call of God personally if they are to be affirmed as chosen of God and able to accept the given of their life’s present situation within which ministry is to be offered.

The call of God is received as something intensely personal rather than a call to something in general: “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3). Also, “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1). It is this sense of personal calling that makes faith real. One may well say, “Faith is the assurance that I am called of God and that I have been *chosen*. God’s purpose in my life is recognized in the call of God to me. Being called is to recognize that I belong to God and thus I live in dependence on God.”

We recognize the importance of each person sensing very deeply that “*I am called* according to the gifts of God unto me” as well as being able to recite that “*all are called* according to the gifts of God unto them” (D. and C. 119:8b). Members should be encouraged to see their baptism and confirmation as the church’s official recognition of their calling to “the office of member” and their own acknowledgment of Jesus’ call to discipleship.

## **Office of Member**

The “office of member” designation is applied to any person who has a sense of personal calling to the work of a Christian, as expressed through water baptism and confirmation in the church. The office of member is synonymous with full membership in the church. One who thereby holds the office of member may perform any function of the church, other than the presiding and sacramental roles that are the responsibility of specific priesthood offices. This safeguards the long-standing tradition and polity of the church, reflecting the right and authority of a believer to represent Christ in the life of the body of Christ.

As with priesthood, so also will members who take their responsibility seriously want to magnify their calling as disciples through Temple School continuing education and through participation in the classes offered by the Community of Christ Seminary. Priesthood members should be looking for innovative ways to impress on all members that they continue to play vital roles in the church. It may be easy for those not called to priesthood, whether they desire it or not, to feel left out. Church leaders are encouraged to create and share innovative suggestions applicable to field situations.

## **Two Priesthoods**

There are two priesthoods, the Melchisedec and the Aaronic. Within these priesthood orders there are several offices, each with special functions and ministries to perform.

The Melchisedec priesthood is “the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God” (D. and C. 104:1b). The Aaronic priesthood includes a Christian form of the Levitical ministries described in the Old Testament. It was named after Aaron who was ordained to this responsibility under the hands of Moses.

Because of its divine origin, priesthood is a stewardship. It involves our human spiritual condition before the throne of God. Stewardship implies responsibility because human agency includes both the freedom to make choices and the responsibility for such choices.

## **Priesthood Offices**

Priesthood office is the designation of the position within the church in which the priesthood member acts. To speak of priesthood office is to refer both to the authority to act and the area of ministry in which the priesthood member works.

There is no difference in the importance of various priesthood roles, although there are differences in the offices in which one is to act (D. and C. 129:7c). In addition to priesthood office, it is also important to note that there are administrative and jurisdictional factors that bear upon the work of the priesthood member. A member of the priesthood functions within an organizational structure and in doing so is responsible to the pastor and other jurisdictional officers such as the mission center president, financial officer, and the field apostle.

The duties and privileges of the various members of the priesthood are defined in the Doctrine and Covenants. Although the offices may be named in other scriptures and some of the duties and privileges inferred from the context, it is the Doctrine and Covenants that is specific about these matters.

## **Common Duties and Responsibilities**

There are certain duties and responsibilities that are expected of all priesthood members whether they be Aaronic or Melchisedec. They should be diligent in their work and carry out all their duties as faithfully and as promptly as possible. They are to lead clean lives, avoiding the use of tobacco, alcoholic drinks, and other potentially addictive and harmful substances. They are all called to minister by teaching, expounding, and preaching the gospel. They are to invite all to come to Christ.

Priesthood members should be an example in their joyous response to the call for disciples to be generous in their giving to the church and to other good causes. The concept of a disciple's generous response calls all members, and especially priesthood members, to "render unreserved and fully accountable service—good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (D. and C. 154:6).

This is but one area in which the member of the priesthood should live an exemplary life, but it is one that needs serious

consideration by every member of the priesthood because it is so easy to neglect this aspect of one's commitment to Christ. A priesthood member is expected to be an example in leading a life of discipleship.

Specific duties, responsibilities, and ministerial focus for each priesthood office are presented in detail in the next two chapters of this manual: Chapter 3, "Melchisedec Ministry: Mission and Vision"; and Chapter 4, "Aaronic Ministers: A Ministry of Presence."

## Definition of Terms

Some semantic confusion exists concerning the difference between *ordination* and *setting apart* by the laying on of hands. Therefore, we define these terms as follows:

**Ordination** is to ministry-specific priesthood offices (i.e., deacon, teacher, priest, elder, seventy, president of seventy, high priest, bishop, Presiding Bishopric, evangelist, presiding evangelist, apostle, First Presidency, president of the high priesthood and of the church).

**Setting apart** by laying on of hands is to specific leadership roles within quorums, councils, orders, mission centers, and congregations. For example, the person may be said to be ordained an elder and set apart as the pastor of a congregation. In congregations, the setting apart is performed by high priests or elders under the direction of the mission center president whenever there is a change in pastor. In the case of a mission center president or financial officer, the setting apart is done by the field apostle or authorized representative whenever there is a change in a mission center officer.

Counselors to presiding officers in congregations and mission centers do not need to be set apart, as their authority is derived from the presiding officers.

Members of the Standing High Council, senior president of Seventy, the presidency of the Quorum of High Priests, and the president of the Council of Twelve Apostles are set apart to these specific roles.

## Churchwide Leadership

In its early life the church was small and its organization was simple. As the church grew, provision was made for a more complex organization. From time to time officers have been added to the church in response to the church's need. Even today we should not assume that the priesthood structure and organization is full and complete.

The **First Presidency** is the leading quorum of the church and presides over the whole church. The president of the church is the president of the high priesthood. The First Presidency is made up of three high priests. Besides being president of the high priesthood, the president is the prophet, seer, and revelator of the church. The president bears the responsibility of bringing prophetic instruction to the church. It is the responsibility of the First Presidency to be the chief interpreters of the word of God to the church (see World Conference Resolution 386, paragraph 9).

Of this quorum the scriptures state

The burden of the care of the church is laid on him who is called to preside over the high priesthood of the church, and on those who are called to be his counselors; and they shall teach according to the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and as they shall be directed by revelation, from time to time.—D. and C. 122:2

The First Presidency is assisted in judicial matters and in giving advice on some areas of church policy by the **Standing High Council**. The First Presidency preside over the Standing High Council. The Standing High Council does not make church policy or interpret scriptures and laws of the church. The council members do give advice and counsel to the First Presidency who, as the chief interpreters of the law, are the ones on whom the responsibility rests to promulgate church policy.

Members of the apostolic quorum are called apostles. This quorum is commonly called the **Council of Twelve**. They are the Second Presidency (see D. and C. 122:9c and 148:10b) and are associated with the First Presidency in leading the church in witness and through field administration. They are the sec-

ond highest council in the church. When the president of the church dies or is incapacitated, it is the responsibility of the Council of Twelve to call the church together and preside while the church selects a new president. The scriptures provide a description of the Twelve:

The Twelve are a traveling, presiding high council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the church, agreeably to the institution of heaven, to build up the church and regulate all the affairs of the same, in all nations; first unto the Gentiles, and secondly unto the Jews.—D. and C. 104:12

The Council of Twelve has primary responsibility for the church's missionary outreach. Members of the Twelve are called to bear their own personal witness of Jesus Christ, but more important, they enable the church to bear its witness as the body or fellowship of Christ's followers. To help do this they search out and ordain those who are called to be evangelists or spiritual parents to the church. It is in harmony with their calling that members of the Council of Twelve are assigned to administer the work of the church in the field. As the leading missionary council, the Twelve are the natural associates of the seventies, who share with them the missionary work. The apostles direct the seventies in their ministries.

The office of seventy is a specialized function of the eldership. An elder may be called and ordained to the ministry of the seventy and given a missionary assignment beyond the local congregation. A seventy works closely with the field apostle and mission center leadership in developing strategies and resources to implement the missionary task of the church. When a seventy in good standing is released from that ministry his or her priesthood office is that of elder.

The seventies are organized into seven quorums representing the church throughout the world. Each quorum is presided over by a president. Together, the seven quorum presidents compose the **Council of Presidents of Seventy**. One of their number is chosen to preside over the council and is known as the senior president of Seventy. It is the responsibility of the Council of Presidents of Seventy to discern the

call of elders to this ministry. Once such calls are initiated by the council, they are submitted to the World Church Leadership Council (see below for a description of this group) for final approval. The presidents of Seventy coordinate education and training for the members of the quorums. In addition, they facilitate the gathering of seventies in smaller clusters for fellowship and support. The seventies and Council of Presidents of Seventy serve together in calling and equipping the church in sharing a vibrant witness of Jesus Christ.

The **Presiding Bishopric** is composed of the presiding bishop and two counselors. They are the chief financial officers and trustees of the church and are responsible for the administration of the temporal affairs of the whole church. Members of the Presiding Bishopric share the duty of leading the Order of Bishops in providing support and mentoring to financial officers at the congregation and mission center level as well as collaboration and guidance for self-sustaining bishops.

The **Order of Bishops** guides the church in teaching and preaching the principles of Disciples' Generous Response plus the broader concept of stewardship. The Presiding Bishopric serves as the presidency of the Aaronic priesthood (D. and C. 104:8c) and leads the Order of Bishops in providing support, training, and advocacy in empowering Aaronic ministers to respond to their call of ministry. Another area of ministry for the bishopric is that of serving as judges in church court proceedings.

High priests ordained to the specialized function of evangelists are members of the **Order of Evangelists**, which is presided over by the presiding evangelist. Free of administrative responsibilities, evangelists are responsive to the reconciling and redeeming influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people. As ministers of blessing they give parental counsel and advice to the church and confer spiritual blessings. The ordinance of evangelist's blessing provides divine affirmation and support in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations.

The First Presidency, the Council of Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric function together as the **World Church Leadership Council**. The duties of this council include approval of calls to the offices of seventy and bishop,

approval of the organization of new mission centers, providing counsel to the leading quorums, and consideration of broad policy issues. To this council, from time to time, additional persons are added because of the unique contribution they make to the administrative, programmatic, or missionary ministries of the church.



## Chapter 3

# Melchisedec Ministry: Mission and Vision

The Melchisedec priesthood offers the ministry of mission and vision to the church. This means that ministers in these offices help the church to focus on its central mission and to envision the ever-deepening call to discipleship that is resident in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Melchisedec (often spelled “Melchizedek”) was an ancient king of Salem (probably Jerusalem) during the time of Abraham. He is a mysterious figure, mentioned briefly in just a few verses of the Bible. He was both a king and a priest; and although he lived before the formation of the Jewish people, he was obviously held in great respect by Jewish tradition. Abraham sought him out so that Melchisedec could bless him, and it was to him that Abraham gave his tithing to God (see Genesis 14:18–20/14:17–20 IV).

The early verses of chapter 7 of the letter to the Hebrews refer to Melchisedec, and he is presented as resembling the ministry of Jesus Christ. Thus, Melchisedec was seen by the Jewish tradition as a model for the Jewish priesthood and by the Christian tradition as a prefiguring of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In the Restoration movement, Joseph Smith Jr. also found in Melchisedec a model for priesthood ministry in the church. Joseph’s religious experiences led him to understand that the priesthood was composed of two orders—the Aaronic priesthood (composed of the offices of deacon, teacher, and priest) and the Melchisedec priesthood. His understanding is most clearly set forth in Section 104 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

## **Structure of the Melchisedec Priesthood**

The Melchisedec priesthood may best be understood as being composed of two primary offices—elder and high priest. Some elders are also called to the specialized missionary ministry of the office of seventy. Some high priests are also called to the specialized offices of evangelist, bishop, apostle, and president.

The offices of elder and high priest form the ministerial foundation for the more specialized offices. While some ministers may function for many years in one or more of the specialized offices, many eventually return to the basic office of their calling.

Elders have been called “ministers of mission” (see the Temple School course, *The Elder: Minister of Mission*). This means that the ministry of the elder relates concrete acts of ministry to the larger mission of the church as the agent of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Thus, the ministry of the elder is very direct and tangible, but it also expresses the deeply spiritual ministry of the gospel. The mission of the church is expressed most directly and concretely in congregations, and the ministry of the elder is typically expressed in the context of a congregation.

High priests have been called “ministers of vision” (see the Temple School course, *High Priests: Ministers of Vision*). In various ways, the ministry of high priests expresses a vision of how concrete acts of ministry in a congregational context relate to the worldwide mission of the gospel. Just as every personal act of ministry occurs in the context of a congregation, so also does the ministry of every congregation relate to the ministry of congregations everywhere in the world as part of one great expression of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the high priest, then, typically expresses the relationship between local congregations and the church throughout the world.

## **Focus of Ministry**

As ministers of mission and vision, members of the Melchisedec priesthood have specific areas of focus to their ministry. While all Melchisedec ministers may not function equally in each area of ministry, the following are typical:

***Ministers of Sacrament.*** While those holding the office of priest are authorized to perform some sacraments, ministry in the sacraments of the church is a central characteristic of a member of the Melchisedec priesthood. Sacraments use ordinary objects and actions as symbols of the deeper spiritual nature of our lives. Through the sacraments, the church offers its members and friends ways of understanding and sharing in this deeper spiritual reality.

For this reason, members of the Melchisedec priesthood reflect regularly on the sacraments and the sacramental nature of human life. Sacramental ministry is more than simply performing the sacraments “correctly.” It includes speaking and acting out of a deep awareness of the needs people have for the ministry of the gospel and how the gospel can speak to the needs that people bring to it.

***Ministers of Service.*** The many responsibilities and opportunities of Melchisedec ministry do not exist for their own sake or for the glorification of those who offer this ministry. Rather, this ministry is most effective and genuine when it reflects Jesus Christ, who came to live among us as a servant. Thus, the focus of a sermon is on the gospel and on the congregation, not on the preacher. One who presides seeks to empower the church, not to exercise power over it. Ministry is most effective when the minister is a servant.

***Ministers of Presiding.*** Melchisedec priesthood members are often found in presiding roles. They preside in worship, and they preside over congregations and other jurisdictional levels of the church. In the spirit of Christ as the servant of all, a minister who presides makes decisions on behalf of the body. Presumably, Melchisedec ministers have the benefit of knowledge and experience in their decision making. Because they are also ministers, members of the Melchisedec priesthood are called to make decisions that reflect the wisdom and benefit of the entire body.

***Ministers of Teaching and Learning.*** The church might be thought of as a school of God’s love. Each disciple has much to learn, and the fellowship of the church is intended to provide a supportive learning environment. Members of the Melchisedec priesthood are called to teach because of the

experience they have had in receiving and reflecting on God's grace. Melchisedec ministers are also learners because no single person knows all that can be known about God and the good news.

Regular study of the scriptures and "all good books" (D. and C. 87:5b) should be part of the spiritual discipline of every Melchisedec minister. Such study can be done alone, in small groups, or in formal classes. Some combination of these methods is preferred. Experience has shown that good teachers are also engaged in the process of learning, and the best teachers understand that some of their best learning comes from their students.

***Ministers of the Spirit.*** Members of the Melchisedec priesthood should be engaged regularly in prayer and other spiritual disciplines. An active outward ministry requires an active inward journey with the Holy Spirit. Each person is unique. Therefore, each person will find some ways of prayer and some spiritual disciplines to be more valuable than others. Similarly, different personalities may require differences in the balance of time spent in outward ministry and inward spiritual disciplines.

A variety of books and other resources are available from Herald House to assist ministers in meeting their spiritual needs. While much of any disciple's spiritual work needs to be done alone, there is also value in sharing the spiritual journey in small groups. These groups may be informal gatherings or provide more structured experiences, such as in Covenant Discipleship Groups.

***Ministers of Leadership.*** Melchisedec ministers often hold positions of administrative leadership in the church. Even when they do not, Melchisedec ministers are engaged in the ministry of leadership. Leadership is more than accomplishing a set of specific tasks. True ministerial leadership helps disciples to understand the relationships between specific activities of ministry and the larger mission of the church to "proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace."

Ministerial leadership also helps disciples capture the vision of a world remade through a church that is "a worldwide

community dedicated to peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit.” Thus, when disciples clean the church, teach a church school class, or serve food to the homeless, every concrete act contributes to the mission of the church and to a vision of the world as God would want it to be. Working beside other disciples, Melchisedec ministers help other disciples to understand these connections and to see themselves as part of a much larger movement.

***Ministers of Peace and Justice.*** Even a cursory look at our world would tell us that things are not as God would have them be. God does not desire that people be victims of war or other violence, victims of hatred and discrimination, or victims of substance abuse. Members of the Melchisedec priesthood are called to help the church see beyond the present moment, to envision a future in which every person lives in dignity as a child of God, and to find ways of acting concretely to that end.

Such work is not easy. It is possible to be distracted by political arguments, cultural differences, and competing visions of what God desires for creation. Melchisedec ministers are called to help disciples grow in their understanding of peace and justice and to call disciples to take action when and where they can. The call to peace and justice is always a call back to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a ministry of which the world is in great need.

The ministry of the Melchisedec priesthood is very broad. While it is often seen in the visible ministry of the church in worship, it is also deeply rooted in the broader mission of the church as the body of Christ in the world. It is a ministry that requires the best of every minister who is called to it.

## **Duties of the Elders**

All members of the Melchisedec priesthood may appropriately be called elders. However, the office of elder is an appendage to the high priesthood and should be recognized as such.

The duties of an elder are detailed in the Doctrine and Covenants (see Sections 17:8, 42:12c–d and 22a, 107:44, 111:1, 120:2a, and 143:3a) and include the following:

1. Winning people to Christ and baptizing those who are ready to commit their lives to Christ.

2. Ordaining other elders, priests, teachers, and deacons.

3. Administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion).

4. Confirming individuals by the laying on of hands for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

5. Teaching, expounding, exhorting, and watching over the church.

6. Conducting and taking the lead of meetings as the elder is led by the Holy Spirit according to the commandments and revelations of God.

7. Blessing little children.

8. Solemnizing and performing marriage ceremonies.

9. Presiding over a congregation when selected to do so.

10. Serving in the office of seventy when called and ordained for this office.

11. Serving in judiciary matters as a member of an elder's court when appointed to such a responsibility.

12. Praying for and administering to the sick (see also James 5:14–15).

13. Visiting the homes of the members to encourage, strengthen, comfort, and teach them.

All ministry grows out of the elder's responsibility to strengthen the faith of the people and to encourage, nurture, and sustain them. Those who are ill need relief. Members are admonished to call on the elders in times of illness. The poor need the ministry of elders who have a deep concern for their well-being. The elders should visit the members to ascertain and minister to needs of the poor.

The value of the Holy Spirit for nurture and sustenance goes beyond that of temporal needs. The elder is called on to preach faith, repentance, remission of sins, and reception of the Holy Spirit among the people. The elder is to be an evangelist, calling all to come to Christ and teaching them the gospel. An elder may also be asked to travel as a missionary. Elders are to call people to a sense of their destiny as a new humanity and as citizens of the kingdom of God. This requires the utmost in elders' consecration and diligence if they are to realize the

accomplishments that are a part of the stewardship of Melchisedec priesthood.

## **Duties of High Priests**

The office of high priest is the basic office of the Melchisedec priesthood. Bishops, evangelists, apostles, and presidents are specialized officers of the high priesthood. When any of these cease to function in a specialized ministry and are released from their quorums or orders, they continue to serve as high priests.

Certain administrative officers who have long-term responsibilities are also set apart by the laying on of hands. Mission center presidents and financial officers, pastors, quorum presidents, and presidents of Seventy are set apart in this way.

The church is administered through members of the priesthood. Presiding officers are generally chosen from among the high priests. Ideally, the presiding officers of well-established, large congregations should be high priests, but in situations where none are available or acceptable to the members, an elder may be chosen. In developing areas of missionary potential, a seventy may appropriately serve as the president of a mission center or pastor of a congregation. While a pastor should ideally be chosen from among the high priests or elders, in cases where no high priests or elders are available or acceptable, the presiding officer of a congregation may be a priest, teacher, or deacon (D. and C. 120:2).

We are informed in the scriptures of the rights and responsibilities of the Melchisedec priesthood:

The Melchisedec priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church, in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things. The presidency of the high priesthood, after the order of Melchisedec, have a right to officiate in all the offices in the church. High priests, after the order of the Melchisedec priesthood, have a right to officiate in their own standing, under the direction of the Presidency, in administering spiritual things, and also in the office of

an elder, priest (of the Levitical order), teacher, deacon, and member. An elder has a right to officiate in his stead when the high priest is not present. The high priest and elder are to administer in spiritual things, agreeably to the covenants and commandments of the church; and they have a right to officiate in all these offices of the church when there are no higher authorities present.... The power and authority of the higher, or Melchisedec, priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church; to have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; to have the heavens opened unto them; to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn; and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.—D. and C. 104:3b–7, 9

The nature and responsibility of Melchisedec priesthood require that those ordained to function in this ministry be of godly character. Their quality of life should be on such a spiritual level that they may be led by the Holy Spirit. One of the major responsibilities of Melchisedec priesthood members is to administer in spiritual things. This is to be experienced as they function through the sacraments, especially those involving the laying on of hands for spiritual blessings. These include such ministries as the laying on of hands in confirmation for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, administration for the sick, ordination, and for conferring special blessings. They should be spiritually sensitive to the needs of the people to whom they minister as they preach, teach, counsel, and comfort them. They are called to be alert to discern the gifts exercised by persons as they function within the church (see I Corinthians 12:8–10).

There are many gifts such as preaching, writing, teaching, stewardship ministries, counseling, and artistic gifts that are also quickened by the Holy Spirit. Melchisedec priesthood members should be sensitive to these, and presiding officers should be especially discerning of such gifts in the calling and assigning of individuals to responsibility.

The faith and godly character of members of the Melchisedec priesthood should be evidenced by an affirmative and

cheerful heart and countenance, and cleanliness of spirit, body, and clothing. They should avoid the appearance of evil, being “without blame in word and deed” (D. and C. 119:3). Jealousy should have no part in their lives (D. and C. 121:4c).

Members of the Melchisedec priesthood should observe the covenants and church articles (D. and C. 42:5b). In this way they may be an example to those who follow. They should be diligent in preparation and in the functions of their office (D. and C. 38:9c and 104:44).

The Melchisedec priesthood has an important place in the church. Each one is a spiritual leader whose life must be acceptable to God and the people. The Melchisedec priesthood member is an example to the people and should visit them in their homes, minister to them in their worship, search for the lost, and in all ways be a good shepherd to the flock.



## **Chapter 4**

# **Aaronic Ministers: A Ministry of Presence**

### **Introduction**

We are a blessed community. Individuals are accepting the call to ministerial responsibility as Aaronic priesthood. These ministers witness for Jesus Christ by calling individuals, families, congregations, and communities into deeper relationships with each other and our Lord. The presence of Aaronic ministers in our faith community is essential for our nurturing as a people who desire to be a global expression of Christ's Peaceable Kingdom on earth. Under the direction of the Presiding Bishopric, ministerial focuses have been provided for each Aaronic priesthood office. These ministerial focuses complement the foundational duties of the Aaronic minister found in the Doctrine and Covenants and together have brought a fresh and expansive presence of Christ's ministry into our congregations and communities.

### **Spiritual Development**

God calls Aaronic priesthood into significant ministries. Through the Aaronic priesthood, the ministry of presence is offered to humankind. This models Jesus' ministry as comforter, peacemaker, and friend to our congregations and communities.

Aaronic priesthood members are intimately involved with the spiritual development of the membership. This development occurs when foundational ministries are offered and received. Some of these ministries include the following: reaching out in joyful and loving service, meeting the needs of the poor, extend-

ing the hands of reconciliation, encouraging disciples to generously share their witness and resources, and deepening worship and prayer in families. Aaronic priesthood members help us live by the principles of repentance. God, who creates, sustains, and acts in our behalf, empowers Aaronic priesthood to be a ministry of presence in our congregations and communities.

## **Historical Background**

From very early times, God has called persons to priesthood responsibilities. This divinely chosen priesthood body has been ordained to preach and teach the witness of Jesus Christ, and to lead people to a godly way of life.

The scriptures indicate that the Lord said to Moses, “Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar” (Exodus 28:1). These men were consecrated for a “perpetual priesthood throughout all generations to come” (Exodus 40:15). The Aaronic priesthood traces its beginning to this divine event.

In March 1835 while in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith Jr. sought guidance on the calling and responsibilities of priesthood. Doctrine and Covenants Section 104 indicates that the Aaronic priesthood is called and conferred after Aaron and his descendents. Earlier, Oliver Cowdery, in an October 1834 letter to W. W. Phelps, recounted his and Joseph’s ordination experience to the Aaronic priesthood:

An angel said, Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of the Messiah I confer this priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

The Aaronic priesthood represents the calling of individuals into three different offices. These include the deacon, teacher, and priest. Each of these offices has certain distinctive areas of ministry, but all of these offices provide a ministry of presence to our congregations and communities. The Presiding Bishopric presides over the Aaronic priesthood and is responsible for the education and training of this priesthood.

## Ministry of Presence

Jesus reminded his disciples on his last night with them that ministry is not about prestige or status, but about the hard and demanding task of *being with*: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). To be a minister of presence is not to be above, beyond, or outside the human struggle, nor is it to be higher on some imaginary hierarchical ladder. It is to be *among*. The ministry of presence is rooted in the Incarnation—God being with us in the presence of Jesus Christ—and makes that saving event vital and real for the people we are called to serve.

Aaronic ministers are called to be ministers of presence committed to Jesus Christ and the cause of the Peaceable Kingdom. Each Aaronic priesthood office models a particular aspect of Jesus’ ministry and expresses that ministry to individuals and families in the congregations they serve and the communities in which they live.

**Deacons** will model “Jesus as Comforter” in expressing their ministry of service and nurturing individuals and families in the congregation and community.

**Teachers** will model “Jesus as Peacemaker” in expressing their ministry of reconciliation with individuals and families in the congregation and community.

**Priests** will model “Jesus as Friend” in expressing their ministry with families, congregations, and community.

Henri Nouwen wrote,

It is Jesus who heals, not I; Jesus who speaks words of truth, not I; Jesus who is Lord, not I. This is very clearly made visible when we proclaim the redeeming power of God [through his son Jesus Christ]. Indeed, whenever we minister together, it is easier for people to recognize that we do not come in our own name but in the name of the Lord Jesus who sent us.<sup>2</sup>

The call to be ministers of presence blends scriptural Aaronic duties with ministerial focuses and sends forth Aaronic priesthood to minister for the cause of the Peaceable Kingdom.

## **The Duties of the Deacon as Comforter**

As members of the Aaronic priesthood, deacons are ordained according to the gifts and calling of God to them by the power of the Holy Spirit. The duties of the deacon include the following:

1. Watch over the church.
2. Visit in the homes of the Saints.
3. Teach and preach.
4. Care for the physical and social well-being of the church.
5. Arrange for the receiving of Mission Tithes offerings at church services.
6. Teach and advise the people regarding the principles of Disciples' Generous Response.
7. Serve when appropriate as congregational financial officer.

The deacon is responsible for the care of the church facility. It is to be inviting and provide a comforting environment for worship and fellowship. This ministry of hospitality should make people feel they are appreciated.

The deacon also cares for members and friends relating to the temporal aspects of life. This ministry includes being aware and sensitive to people's physical and spiritual health and financial needs. They teach about stewardship as response to Christ's ministry and they teach the principles of Disciples' Generous Response.

The following ministerial focuses enhance the role of deacons in the church:

### ***Service Ministries***

- Reaches out in loving and joyful service to the church and community.
- Is aware of and appreciates the forms and styles of worship to enhance the presence of the Spirit, and provides supportive ministry.
- Welcomes those who come to church and provides a comforting environment for their worship and fellowship experiences.

- Understands the importance of well-kept church properties and provides leadership for ongoing maintenance and efficient operations.

### ***Sharing Ministries***

- Seeks out the needs of the poor, the sick, the helpless, and the unloved, reaching out to provide assistance.
- Is sensitive to the spiritual, physical, temporal needs of individuals and families in the congregation.
- Assists persons in their understanding and response as generous disciples.

### **The Duties of the Teacher as Peacemaker**

The duties of the teacher are given in Doctrine and Covenants 17:11 and in *World Conference Resolutions*. The teacher's calling includes the following responsibilities:

1. Be with and strengthen the membership.
2. See that the church meets often.
3. Take the lead in meetings in the absence of the elder or priest.
4. Preach and teach.
5. Reconcile those who have taken offense either at another person or the church.
6. Lead people into paths of discipleship.

A teacher is a peacemaker and one whose empathy lends strength through understanding and service to the members of the church. The key attribute of a teacher is the ability to cultivate a friendship and have knowledge of the families in the congregation.

The teacher is also seen as shepherd, one who closely associates with the flock and recognizes the life problems that the members face every day. The teacher's relationship to the membership is one of redemptive love and concern, especially for those who have need for personal spiritual support.

Teachers will visit the members in their homes and at other times as is reasonable and needful. The teacher will cultivate close contact with the members and sense when members have needs beyond the teacher's ability to support. This information should be communicated to an appropriate

congregational leader. These persons may be referred for professional help.

The following ministerial focuses enhance the role of teachers in the church:

### ***Encourager***

- Promotes the development and nurturing of a healing, redeeming, and prayerful environment.
- Is sensitive to the needs of the congregation.
- Encourages participation and inclusion of all to share in the blessings of community.
- Serves as an advocate for home ministry.

### ***Worth of Persons***

- Respects each person and expresses compassion for his or her life journey.
- Helps individuals build positive self-images and self-esteem.
- Partners with evangelists to provide ministry that empowers spiritual development.

### ***Peace Building***

- Assists persons in building relationships based on love and acceptance.
- Fosters development of positive communication and interaction.
- Promotes awareness of peace and justice issues in the church and community.

### ***Conflict Resolution***

- Promotes an environment that is ready to listen and slow to criticize.
- Is available for ministry should conflict arise.
- Encourages the use of trained individuals to address conflicts.

## **The Duties of the Priest as Friend**

The duties of the priest are given in Doctrine and Covenants 17:10, 111:1, and 120:2, and in *World Conference Reso-*

*lutions*. The priest's calling includes the following responsibilities:

1. Ministry to families.
2. Preach and teach.
3. Baptize by water.
4. Administer the Lord's Supper.
5. Solemnize and perform marriages where the laws of the land allow.
6. Ordain other priests, teachers, and deacons.
7. Preside over a congregation when elected by the people.
8. Take the lead in meetings when no elder is present or when delegated that responsibility.
9. Hold the key to angelic ministry.<sup>3</sup>

The Aaronic priest preaches the gospel of Christ, visits members in their homes, encourages them to pray vocally and in secret, and to attend to their family duties. He or she shares with the elder in the responsibility of explaining all things concerning the church to those who have been baptized, but not yet confirmed. In all of their ministry they may expect the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The following ministerial focuses enhance the role of priests in the church:

### ***Ministry to Families***

- Shares God's gift of unconditional love for each family member.
- Interacts with families to support their spiritual growth and discipleship response through prayer, knowledge of scripture, and relationships.
- Extends the hand of reconciliation to those with broken spirits and assists in finding pathways for healing.

### ***Ministry in Congregations***

- Shares the ministry of Christ to bring peace and wholeness to every life.
- Understands and participates in the sacramental and worship life of the church.
- Promotes presence and participation in church life.

## ***Ministry in Community***

- Is involved in and knowledgeable about community services that may assist those in need.
- Serves as advocate for members and families throughout the community (for example, work, schools, civic organizations, and social agencies).

## **Called to Ministry**

“Do you love me?” Three times Peter was asked this defining question about his relationship with Jesus (John 21:15–17). Jesus did not want to know what Peter thought about him. Instead, he wanted to know if Peter’s heart had been transformed by their relationship. If it had been, then Peter was ready to accept his call to minister as shepherd to God’s people. But the question posed to Peter is now each Aaronic priesthood member’s to answer: “Do you love me?” Henri Nouwen, Catholic theologian and pastor, wrote, “There is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, that cares, that reaches out and wants to heal.”<sup>4</sup> The call to minister must come from the transformed heart, a heart touched so deeply by God’s love through the ministry of Jesus Christ that the only response can be, “I will hold your people in my heart.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Notes**

1. In the letter to W.W. Phelps written by Oliver Cowdery (with the collaboration of Joseph Smith) in the *Latter Day Saints Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 1 (Kirtland, Ohio: October 1834): 16.
2. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 24.
3. For further information, see “Ministry of Angels,” *World Conference Bulletin* (April 4, 1994): 281–282. Reprinted in Temple School Course AM 200, Aaronic Ministries: Ministers of Presence, appendix 2.
4. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 24.
5. Daniel L. Schutte, “Here I Am, Lord,” *Sing a New Song* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1999), 12.

## Chapter 5

# Priesthood Accountability and Discipleship

Hear, O my people, regarding my holy priesthood. The power of this priesthood was placed in your midst from the earliest days of the rise of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity. There have been priesthood members over the years, however, who have misunderstood the purpose of their calling. Succumbing to pride, some have used it for personal aggrandizement. Others, through disinterest or lack of diligence, have failed to magnify their calling or have become inactive. When this has happened, the church has experienced a loss of spiritual power, and the entire priesthood structure has been diminished.

It is my will that my priesthood be made up of those who have an abiding faith and desire to serve me with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion. Therefore, where there are those who are not now functioning in their priesthood, let inquiry be made by the proper administrative officers, according to the provisions of the law, to determine the continuing nature of their commitment....

Remember, in many places there is still much uncertainty and misunderstanding regarding the principles of calling and giftedness. There are persons whose burden in this regard will require that considerable labor and ministerial support be provided. This should be extended with prayer and tenderness of feeling, that all may be blessed with the full power of my reconciling Spirit.—Doctrine and Covenants 156:7, 8, 10

This inspired counsel calls our attention to the fact that we have in the past often been uncertain about the matter of priesthood calling. We have misunderstood the principles of calling and giftedness. Presiding officers who have sensed the importance of their responsibility in calling persons to priesthood have felt the burden most heavily. The responsibility to exercise wisdom and judgment as well as respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit have led many to wrestle with their own sense of integrity, both in calling and not calling certain persons to priesthood offices.

## **Pre-ordination Preparation**

All who are called to serve in the priesthood are required to participate in a program of pre-ordination preparation and training. For those being called to a priesthood office for the first time, there is a requirement that before ordination the candidate complete three Temple School courses: An Introduction to Understanding Scripture, Introduction to Caring Ministry, and the appropriate office-centered course. For subsequent ordinations the candidate should take the office-centered course for the new office as well as one additional course in scripture study.

Pastors should assure that the candidate for ordination is given opportunities to have specific priesthood responsibilities explained. It is well for mission centers to plan periodic priesthood orientation classes and a program of ongoing priesthood education.

## **Examining Ourselves as Priesthood**

Doctrine and Covenants 156:8 calls our attention to our need to reexamine our commitments, activities, growth, and motivation for being members of the priesthood. Priesthood does not exist independently from the persons who exercise the priesthood or the situation in which it is exercised. This means that priesthood is not a state of being, but rather a response to calling. Individuals do not “put on priesthood” like one would put on a coat or a shirt. The response each of us makes to God’s call to discipleship is in some respects intrinsic with and pecu-

liar to the person and a recognition that God, who is purposefully at work in creation, has endowed us with gifts to minister to each other and the corporate body of the church.

God, loving the human race so much, entered into human history in Jesus Christ. This God, who allowed the destructive powers of sin, prejudice, entrenched interests, and fear to crucify Jesus, has a right to say to us, as did the apostle Paul to the Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.—Romans 12:1–2

In the spirit of Paul's instruction, Doctrine and Covenants 156 calls us to consider our role in priesthood more seriously by being diligently active in ministry, humble in bearing, not using priesthood for self-interest, honor, or aggrandizement. The value and effectiveness of priesthood are diminished when it is taken lightly, and the church as a whole suffers.

## **Priesthood Accountability and Planning**

To strengthen priesthood ministry the church suggests that priesthood members should meet with their pastor or other appropriate church officer from time to time to evaluate their ministry including such things as ministerial growth through priesthood education, diligent activity, personal fulfillment, lifestyle, and the needs of their jurisdiction for the kind of ministry given. In such a review the priesthood member and pastor might both feel inspired that the needs of the church and the priesthood member's gifts suggest a call of God to another office. If this is so, this may be given further prayerful consideration by the pastor and, if confirmed by the spirit of inspiration, a new call to priesthood ministry may be initiated by the pastor. It is hoped that in general the ministry of priesthood members will be of such quality that the interview will be both joyful and helpful as the participants share in their common call as servants of God.

Most priesthood members will serve in an **active** capacity, responding to the call of God regularly and with diligent application to study and service. Some priesthood members may be unable because of their other commitments, geographic location, or other circumstances to be active and meet the expectations for priesthood. They may choose for a time to be placed in a category of **inactive** status, hoping to work out the circumstances that cause inactivity. When the condition of inactivity becomes permanent or of long duration then the priesthood member should be **released**.

Some priesthood members who have served long and faithfully may be given the honor of **superannuation**. In this category, under the direction of the administrative officers concerned, they may continue to minister according to their abilities but are not any longer under the requirement to meet the expectations of activity and growth expected of active priesthood members.

Making and nurturing disciples is a fundamental purpose of the church. The ministry of the priesthood and the supervision of the priesthood by pastors and other administrative officers serve this larger disciple-making purpose.

Priesthood is neither a privilege nor a right, but a calling within the context of the church (see D. and C. 119:8b). This calling is intended for the benefit of the church and its mission through continuing efforts to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ to people. Ministry reflects the skills and dedication of the minister and also the grace of God. Just as God is faithful to the church through the blessing of its ministry, so priesthood members are called to be faithful and accountable to God and the church for the stewardship of their ministry.

Priesthood authority is conveyed and exercised in the context of the ministries of the church. Thus priesthood ministry is exercised under the direction of one's pastor, mission center president, or other appropriate administrative officer. This office assists priesthood members in coordinating their efforts and magnifying their respective callings. In this sense, all priesthood members are accountable to their supervising administrative officers.

## Priesthood and Discipleship

Priesthood ministry is an extension of the ministry offered by every disciple. Thus effective priesthood ministry begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship begins in the heart of the gospel—through Jesus Christ, God expresses divine love for every person, despite personal failures and shortcomings. None of us is perfect, yet we are called and enabled to give our best to the cause of the gospel.

The ministry of faithful discipleship begins with **spirituality**. Each of us is called to exercise spiritual disciplines that allow us to deepen our commitment and relationship to God. Our spirituality empowers us to extend the ministry of faithful discipleship through the principle of **presence**. Each of us is called to be present and available to other people as well as to God. This ministry of caring and sharing allows for our faithful discipleship to be extended further into the building of **community**. As we share and minister with each other, deeper relationships of community are established and nurtured.

## Priesthood Review

As stated above, it is beneficial for each priesthood member to review his or her ministerial activities on a regular basis and to develop a plan for future ministerial involvement. The following are examples of the kinds of issues for reflection by an individual priesthood member:

1. What areas of ministry have been the focus of your priesthood ministry in the past year?
2. What areas of ministry have given you the most satisfaction in the past year?
3. What areas of ministry have been the most uncomfortable for you in the past year?
4. What has been the nature of your financial response during the past year?
5. What areas of ministerial development would you like to work on in the near future?
6. Looking ahead, do you anticipate any changes to the focus of your priesthood ministry?

It is suggested that priesthood members should plan to meet with their pastor or other appropriate administrative officers annually to discuss these questions and to mutually agree on the nature of their priesthood ministry and response. Such a discussion and review should be conducted in an atmosphere of mutuality and collegiality. The review may be initiated by the priesthood member concerned or by the pastor or other appropriate administrative officers as circumstances may dictate.

It is recommended that all priesthood members complete the Youth Worker Registration process. This is essential for those working with children and youth.

During the priesthood review, the pastor and the priesthood member may agree, if it does not seem wise for the individual to continue to serve in priesthood responsibilities on an active basis, that he or she be placed on inactive status, or released. Or if it seems appropriate, the priesthood member may request the honor of superannuation. This must be approved through the administrative authorities of the church.

A pastor or other appropriate administrative office may take administrative action to place an individual priesthood member on inactive or released status, subject to the right of the individual to appeal to the next higher administrative officer. This action should be not be taken without careful consultation with the priesthood member and a serious attempt to agree on his or her level of commitment and participation.

When a priesthood member is in a situation that hinders the providing of effective ministry, an administrative officer may place the minister under **suspension**. This is a temporary short-lived status in which the priesthood member retains his or her license and may perform ministerial duties with special permission of the administrative officer.

If a priesthood member acts in ways that are unbecoming of a minister, **silence** may be imposed. In this situation, one's authority to function is removed. A silenced priesthood member has the right of appeal.

More detailed descriptions of the various classifications of priesthood functioning can be found in the *Church Administrator's Handbook*. This handbook also contains specific

procedures for administrative officers to follow when placing ministers in categories other than active status.

## **Conclusion**

Priesthood ministry should focus on the “blessing and salvation of humanity” (D. and C. 156:7a). God’s call to individuals today to serve in priesthood ministry is based on their gifts and their willingness to assist others to grow as disciples of Christ and to transform this world into the long hoped-for kingdom of peace.



## Chapter 6

# The Path of the Disciple

The road to transformation is the path of the disciple.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 161:3d

At the Elders and Congregational Leaders Workshop held in Independence, Missouri, USA, in 1997 President Grant McMurray announced the “Transformation 2000” initiative for the church. He drew from Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a in presenting the following transforming goal: ***We will become a worldwide church dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit.***

This goal included several specific objectives to be achieved:

1. Articulate a clear and compelling Christ-centered theology of peace and justice grounded in the scriptures, faith, and tradition of the Restoration movement.
2. Engage 20,000 children, youth, and young adults in ministries that teach Christian values and Restoration principles, sustain high self-esteem, and involve them in the pursuit of peace and justice through acts of community responsibility.
3. Challenge every congregation to participate in outreach to children and youth and in specific ministries of peace and justice, and enlist 200 congregations willing to model these emphases through high-energy, high-impact congregational witness and service.
4. Establish 200 new congregations through creative ministries of outreach and witness, bringing to the church new life, freshness of spirit, and ethnic and cultural diversity.

5. Add 200 full-time ministers, at least one-third of whom will focus on youth and children, and all others on congregationally based ministries of peace, justice, reconciliation, evangelism, and spiritual revitalization—these additional ministers to be provided by extending a call for sacrificial volunteer service and enhanced financial resources at both the World Church and congregational levels.

Achieving these objectives became a high priority at both World Church and local settings. The numerical goals, numbers two through five, were all completely or almost completely achieved over the next three years. The church was a different organism than it had been before 1997. There was new energy in places that had been “doing business as usual” or were even on the decline for years, even decades.

Yet the church, in the year 2000, was not satisfied to rest on these accomplishments, as amazing as they were. At the Jubilee World Conference that year, President McMurray called the church to build on what it had done and “go deeper.” Here are parts of what he said in his Conference sermon on Monday, April 3, 2000:

Tonight, we summon the church to a transforming faith that moves us prophetically into the future, not knowing where the journey might take us, but assured that we are led by the God who birthed this people on the frontier and now leads us toward the peaceable kingdom, which we call Zion. We are called to be disciples, to follow Jesus Christ. It is he who makes for peace, who reconciles, and heals. It is for us to discern what such a call means in a world that is not at peace and where people are separated and broken and lost.

This call to the church grows out of the heart of our sacred journey. But now we are asked to go deeper, to go beyond the words that touch the imagination so as to encounter the spirit that compels the response. It is to take the sometimes long pathway from the mind to the heart, connecting the two in an unbroken thread of knowing and doing. It is to lay aside predispositions and tired bromides that soothe but do not inspire, and instead to take up the cross and walk the path of the disciple.<sup>1</sup>

President McMurray then went on to spend the rest of his Conference sermon laying out the six elements, or disciplines, of the path.<sup>2</sup> These are as follows:

- The path of the disciple calls us to community.
- The path of the disciple calls us to reconciliation.
- The path of the disciple is to share willingly from the blessings of our lives.
- The path of the disciple requires us to be learners and teachers.
- The path of the disciple takes us to the mountaintop or into the forests or alongside the oceans in search of the God who resides within our own souls.
- The path of the disciple requires us to stand up for justice.

As the Path of the Disciple was shared throughout the church, it was emphasized that these are not six steps where one must first complete one before moving on to the next. Instead they are all equally important. Individuals and congregations were to pray to discern which one or more of these “disciplines” they feel called to incorporate first in their lives.

Thus the concepts of transformation and discipleship became fused, as the latter built on the former. This was expressed succinctly in prophetic counsel given to the church in 2000: “The road to transformation is the path of the disciple” (D. and C. 161: 3d). Members of the Community of Christ, as the church became renamed in April 2001, were urged to see themselves as not just members but as disciples—*disciples of Jesus Christ*.

At the 2002 World Conference, President McMurray presented the six elements of the Path of the Disciple, recast in the form of churchwide goals to be pursued over a four-year period. They were stated as follows, each including a quotation from the inspired counsel found in Section 161:

**1. We will be disciples who share our witness and resources, those who “heed the urgent call to become a global family united in the name of Christ, committed in love to one another.”** This goal was identified as having the top priority for the initial biennium. It has become expressed in two parts: “Each one, reach one,” as applying to sharing our

witness, and “Honor God’s call to tithe,” as an expression of sharing our resources.

**2. We will be learners and teachers, those who “listen attentively to the telling of the sacred story.”** The specific applications of this goal are, “Revitalize the church school and become scripturally literate” and “Engage in learning programs to enhance ministerial effectiveness.”

**3. We will embrace our historic call to be God’s people, those who “create diverse communities of disciples and seekers.”** This goal has three elements: “Strengthen family relationships,” “Establish congregational partnerships,” and “Help expand WorldService Corps.”

**4. We will be agents of reconciliation, “those who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation.”** This involves two aspects: “Learn and use conflict resolution skills” and “Work in cooperative endeavors with other faiths.”

**5. We will be a church composed of persons open to new understandings of spirituality, “embodying the hope and freedom of the gospel” and “seeking new pathways for healing.”** To accomplish this goal, members are encouraged to “Commit yourself to a covenant discipleship group” and “Prepare for and experience vibrant worship.”

**6. We will be a community of people who embody justice, “those who see violence but proclaim peace” and who “feel the yearnings of [our] brothers and sisters.”** Disciples can do this in three ways: “Find ways to help the poor,” “Support neighborhood transformation and justice projects,” and “Seek peaceful solutions.”

Since the 2002 World Conference, the first goal (referred to as the Sharing Goal) has been the primary focus of the allocation of World Church resources and communication efforts. The two parts of this goal go hand in hand, each supporting and complementing the other.

Although it was announced in 2002 that these six goals were to be the focus of the church’s attention for four years, it is anticipated that the overall Path of the Disciple emphasis will last a lot longer than that. In an important sense, this is always and forever the calling of the church: to be the individuals and community that follow Jesus and serve as his disciples.

In a May 2001 *Herald* article, Peter Judd wrote the following about being disciples of Jesus:

An essential element of being a disciple is accepting that despite our unreliability and our stubbornness, God still calls us to be agents of the divine mission of salvation to a broken world. A disciple is not one who always does the will of the one being followed. Rather a disciple is one who gets up and tries again every time he or she falls and knows that God's love and forgiveness are far greater than all human failure and sin.

Rather than using God's all-encompassing love as an excuse for continuing to fall short, we accept it as the foundation on which we can build lives of ever-increasing faithfulness in our discipleship. At its most basic level, the call to be disciples is the call to be followers of Jesus. And followers of Jesus simply go where Jesus goes. If we are to gain insights into how to become more responsible disciples, we will not dwell on the failures and stubbornness or even the good works of Jesus' followers whose lives are chronicled in the New Testament. Instead we will look to the life of Jesus himself. We do not seek to become like Jesus' followers; we are called to *be* Jesus' followers....

The essential call to be as Jesus, in fact to *be* Jesus, remains. Jesus, as orthodox Christian understanding has always held, was God in human form. This is what incarnation means. We are, I truly believe, called to be no less: God in human form for our day. This is the call of discipleship....

More than about doing, the call to walk the path of the disciple is about being. It is much more about developing life habits and skills than it is about adding to an already long "to do" list and feeling good when we can check things off after we have completed them....

Disciples follow Jesus into the places and among the people rejected by mainstream society. Disciples reach out to those whom Jesus called "the least of these who are members of my family" (Matthew 25:40 NRSV). Disciples stop and attend to the wounded and beaten as did the Samaritan in Jesus' well-known parable (Luke 10:25 ff.). Disciples act in solidarity with those members of God's human family who are different from them and who it would be much easier to ignore.

Following Jesus does indeed mean that we do the kinds of things that Jesus did. But it is more about being the kind of person Jesus was. He reached out to *all* people in welcoming acceptance because that's the kind of person he was. It was a true expression of his essential being. Likewise, such loving acceptance and affirmation of the worth of *every* person is the most central affirmation we can make about God.

So at the core of the invitation to walk the path of the disciple is the invitation to be the kind of person Jesus was, to go where Jesus goes. Just as Jesus was present to those who were most in need, so we are called to discern the needy in our world to whom we must be present. And when we have walked with them and talked with them, we may just feel the call to go even deeper—to be one with them.

Being one with people who are “other” is a scary thought. But it is the way of the disciple because it was the way of Jesus. He was not just the friend of the homeless; he was himself homeless. He was not just the advocate of the poor; he was himself poor. He was not just the champion of the rejected ones; he was himself rejected, even to the point of being crucified. If being one with the “other” was the way of Jesus, how can it not be the demand of discipleship?<sup>3</sup>

It is the responsibility of the priesthood to model discipleship for members and friends alike. This does not mean that ordained ministers are necessarily any more righteous than others. It just means that they understand the call to be disciples and take it seriously. They are ever on the lookout for ways to respond creatively and faithfully to Jesus' summons: “Follow me.” They do not allow past habit and tradition to enslave them; rather they are “respectful of tradition.” They understand that “instruction given in former years is applicable in principle and must be measured against the needs of a growing church” (D. and C. 161: 5). As a church, both priesthood and members are called to walk the path of the disciple. And in doing so they will, as God has promised, be transformed.

## Notes

1. World Conference *Bulletin* (April 5, 2000): 370–371.
2. *Ibid.*, 371–374.
3. “Going Where Jesus Goes,” *Herald* 148, no. 5 (May 2001): 21–23.



## Chapter 7

# Sharing Your Witness and Resources

### The Church's Missionary Call

At the heart of the gospel message is the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In deed and in word Christ clearly articulated for his disciples, then and now, the call and commission to be engaged in the salvation of the world.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.—Matthew 28:18–20

This same call and commission comes clearly to the Community of Christ through these words of prophetic counsel:

Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.  
—Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a

These references represent a clear and compelling scriptural mandate for each disciple to be engaged in reaching out and helping bring another person into relationship with Christ and the church. The disciple's response will be motivated by several factors including the following:

- **Belief in the gospel**, which calls the disciple to be a verbal and life witness of the “good news.”
- **Love for the church** as an expression of God’s love for all people, which continues to effectively provide restoring ministries.
- **Response to God’s grace** individually and the desire to share that experience with others, inviting them to respond through baptism and membership in the Community of Christ.
- **Caring about others**, disciples share the best they have with them so that others can be transformed even as they have been.<sup>1</sup>

The sharing of one’s witness is not done in isolation. It relates directly to and is supported by the witness of the congregation, other disciples, and those called to lead by example through ordained ministry.

## The Congregation’s Missionary Call

Each congregation of the Community of Christ is called to be a **witnessing community**. As such it consists of disciples “who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ, are being transformed by Christ’s Spirit, and are journeying with the community of Christ to fulfill the mission of Christ.” Such a congregation is therefore Christ-centered and person-oriented.<sup>2</sup> The members of the congregation individually and collectively are to be fully engaged in ministries of invitation, welcome, acceptance, baptism, and disciple making. While each congregation will provide unique expression of a witnessing community, the commitment must be intentional.

The following four stages or steps have been identified to guide a congregation in sharing its witness:

1. **Foundations** identifies elements that are so essential that they should be in place at the onset.

2. **Building on foundations** suggests steps that can be taken by any size congregation with little or no current experience in missionary outreach that will begin to produce results.

3. ***Gaining momentum*** adds to the previous stages by describing ministries that will accelerate missionary outreach efforts.

4. ***Expanding outreach ministries*** positions the congregation for creative, dynamic outreach ministries beyond what has been previously envisioned or experienced.<sup>3</sup>

In becoming a witnessing community it is vital that the congregation plan and implement the following specific missionary ministries. These have proven to be successful tools in sharing the witness of the good news.

- **Come and See events** planned specifically with guests in mind and to which disciples will be excited about inviting others.
- **Seeker-sensitive worship** that is barrier free and provides opportunity for the Holy Spirit to touch the lives of all present.
- **Inquirers class** held regularly for those who are new to the Community of Christ and seeking to understand the church's faith and beliefs.
- **Disciple-formation experience** planned in different forms to allow a new disciple to grow in spirit and confidence in sharing with others.
- **Prebaptismal classes** for all ages designed to prepare individuals desiring to be baptized for that life-long commitment.
- **Witness support group** for those disciples wanting to reach out to friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors with the active, prayerful support of other disciples.
- **Home missionary sessions** designed to respond to the needs and interests of those seeking to learn more about Christ and the church in the more informal home setting.

The congregation is encouraged to move toward the time when all of these key missionary opportunities are available. Responding to the call for a congregation to share its witness involves much more than activities. At the heart of this effort is the need for the congregation to be continually engaged in prayer, privately and publicly. Growing spiritually in study and reflection as a congregation empowers the corporate wit-

ness. Looking to those gifted in missionary leadership for guidance and training as well as integrating current missionary resources will assist the congregation in its transformation.

Simply stated, a congregation consists of individual disciples and those seeking a new relationship with Christ. It is to *every* disciple, regardless of life circumstance, that the call to “Each One, Reach One” comes. The extent to which each disciple responds to this call in partnership with the Holy Spirit will be reflected in the number of lives impacted by the gospel of Jesus Christ as well as the growth and expansion of the church.

## **The Disciple’s Missionary Call**

The scriptures teach that to every person is given a special ability from God to be shared with others: “Prosecute the missionary work in this land and abroad so far and so widely as you may. All are called according to the gifts of God unto them...for the accomplishment of the work intrusted to all” (D. and C. 119:8a, b). Witnessing the difference Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Community of Christ has made in the life of the disciple is one very important way to be engaged in the “work intrusted to all.”

In response to their personal missionary call, disciples are actively engaged in a dynamic process impacted by the Holy Spirit and the desire to be accountable. The following elements<sup>4</sup> provide a sense of joy for the disciple and a sense of hope for those seeking a new life in Christ:

1. A disciple’s witness is shaped by the life and ministry example of Jesus Christ. It is a personal and contemporary response to the invitation, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Matthew 4:19).

2. A central aspect of one’s witness is the personal testimony. Identifying this testimony comes from recognizing it is a gift from God to be shared with others. This experience provides a growing understanding of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as well as self, and is thus very personal. The fact that what is experienced is real and life changing makes it relevant for other seekers.

3. The witnessing disciple is always faced with barriers.

Uncertainty about what to share, with whom, and when is common, even with those who have a strong desire to witness. Recognizing that barriers do exist, the disciple moves forward in faith, prayer, and with the support of others in transforming these barriers into positive witnessing influences.

4. The disciple then recognizes and acts on the principle of invitation. The scriptures contain many stories of new disciples telling their family and friends about Jesus and inviting them to come and meet him. The disciple constantly is aware of others who may also be open to “meeting” Jesus and invites them using a variety of invitational opportunities.

5. At this point, the vital role of a congregation aligned as a witnessing community becomes critical. The witness of the congregation and the individual disciple come together to provide a supportive environment for both the witnessing disciple and the seeker.

6. Guiding others into a relationship with Jesus Christ is the disciple’s mission and joy. *Being* a disciple is about *making* disciples. Making disciples is about *mentoring* new disciples.

Thus the witnessing disciple helps new disciples shape and share their testimony with their circle of friends. The cycle of sharing one’s witness expands the circle of those who have found new life in Jesus Christ. This new life is then lived out in the Community of Christ where each one is truly reaching out to another.

## The Priesthood’s Missionary Call

As disciples respond to their missionary call, they will look to those called to priesthood ministry for guidance and support. Each priesthood member is called to ministries of modeling, motivating, and mentoring.

**Modeling:** Often people do not want to think of themselves as an example. There is discomfort with the image of being a model. In this ministry, the priesthood member recognizes that *the* model is Jesus Christ. One’s ministry is a reflection of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, which continually focuses on him. Experienced disciples as well as newly forming disciples need someone to point the way in the sharing of their witness.

Ordained ministers in the Community of Christ are called and commissioned as part of their ordination to share a personal testimony of the Christ that is current and relevant. There are resources available to assist priesthood in guiding others in the development of their personal testimony. Furthermore, priesthood members are to practice the ministry of invitation. Inviting others to Christ and the fellowship of the church is a responsibility extended to all participants in the life of the church, which most certainly includes priesthood. Others will be encouraged to invite their acquaintances if they see those called and set apart to serve “practicing what they preach.” The ministry of invitation is also extended through the sacraments. Blessing of children, laying on of hands, marriage, and even the evangelist’s blessing along with baptism can be offered to all.

Living a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life, sharing a personal testimony that is current and relevant, and inviting new people into the fellowship creates a missionary model critically needed in the life of the church. Every priesthood member is called to be engaged in serving as such an example.

***Motivating:*** Priesthood members are intended to be a source of encouragement and enthusiasm. Everyone needs to experience words and actions that magnify desire and intent. Providing this quality of ministry in terms of missionary witness tends to multiply disciples who themselves are enthusiastic about reaching out to share with others. There are many opportunities to provide this ministry, which would include

- *Celebrating the joys of witness.* Allowing the excitement experienced as a result of sharing the Good News with another person to be a part of everyday conversation with another disciple may lead them to a desire to have this joy in their lives as well. In a more public setting, this joy can be shared as guests are introduced to other members of the congregation.
- *Ministry in worship experiences.* Prayer, preaching, testimony, music, and the reading of scripture are but a few opportunities in which the call and joy of witnessing can be expressed. When preparing for participation in a congregational worship experience, priesthood members reflect

on how to integrate the missionary call into their expression of ministry. Inviting all to participate in most of the sacraments can be modeled by the priesthood member.

- *Leadership in teaching and small groups.* Facilitating learning experiences through Christian education opportunities, training classes, and small groups focusing on missionary outreach helps equip disciples in their personal witness. One aspect of ministry is the empowerment of another to follow Christ and witness the difference that relationship has made in his or her life. Disciples are life-long learners who draw from those gifted to teach and train the skills necessary to be effective in witness.

***Mentoring:*** The call to ordained ministry is not intended to be limited to one or two days a week or to special occasions celebrating life events. Ordination is about providing a sustaining presence in the life of the faith community. The spiritual health and well-being of the individual disciple as well as the congregation depends on a corps of spiritual mentors who are committed to walk with those they are called by Christ to love and serve. Mentoring a disciple in the sharing of her or his witness is not just an optional good idea. It is critical to the life of that disciple and also to the congregation. It is at the heart of the church's ability to respond with integrity to the Great Commission. Practical applications of this ministry specifically focusing on the missionary responsibility of the disciple include:

- *Discerning the gifts of others and helping to create opportunities for the use of those gifts.* While priesthood are constantly aware of the need to magnify their own gifts of ministry and service, they are also called to assist others in identifying their God-given abilities. Missionary ministry is expressed in an almost unlimited number of ways. Engaging strangers in meaningful conversation, greeting people in the church parking lot, preaching invitational sermons, sharing the many sacraments that are open to all, and offering a life-transforming testimony are a few examples of unique gifts applied to witnessing. Disciples need to believe they are gifted, discover their missionary

- gift, and then be guided in sharing that gift with others.
- *Calling others to share in missionary opportunities based on the “two by two” principle.* One important aspect of mentoring is witnessing together. Priesthood members are called to invite other disciples to share with them in missionary opportunities. Participation in a witness support group, sharing in leadership of home missionary ministry sessions, co-teaching a prebaptismal class, facilitating an inquirers class, and sharing in testimony during a congregational worship experience are ways that mentoring another witness can be lived out.
  - *Helping others evaluate and improve their missionary skills.* Often new disciples are eager to share the life-changing experiences they have had with others. It is important to support them in this endeavor by helping them continue to improve their witnessing skills. The role of the missionary mentor includes assisting with that evaluation and providing meaningful feedback, which builds the witness’s confidence and effectiveness.

As a model, motivator, and mentor every priesthood member is called to play a key role in transforming congregations into witnessing communities and empowering individual disciples in sharing their witness. The response of the ordained minister to this call will be unique. It will be shaped by ministry gifts. A specialized dimension of witnessing is found in the context of each priesthood ministry focus:

**Deacon**—minister of hospitality, ensuring that every person who comes to a congregational activity is warmly greeted and made to feel welcome.

**Teacher**—minister of reconciliation, connecting those seeking with those desiring to share their witness.

**Priest**—minister of invitation, encouraging seekers to take the next step in becoming disciples and inviting all to receive the blessings the sacraments can bring to their lives.

**Elder**—minister of mission, calling every person to be actively engaged in the witness of compassion, peace and justice, and witness.

The missionary spirit of those called to servant ministry significantly impacts the extent to which the church, individu-

ally and collectively, is faithful to the missionary call: Each One, Reach One!

## Notes

1. Developed by the Council of Twelve Committee on Theology of Mission, 2002.
2. *A Witnessing Community: A Basic Guide to Congregational Missionary Ministry*, revised edition (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 2003), 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 6.
4. From *Walking with Jesus: A Member's Guide in the Community of Christ* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 2004).



## Chapter 8

# Generosity

### Background

God is generous—even extravagant in generosity, thereby satisfying every need (see Philippians 4:19). This is the nature of the Divine. The generosity of God is apparent when we see a beautiful sunrise, hear and feel the waves on the seashore, glimpse the face of a newborn child, eat delectable food, hear music that touches our soul, or smell the fragrance of freshly picked flowers. The most powerful of God’s gifts, though, is found in the Only Begotten Son. Jesus certainly possesses this same generosity and it is easy to observe his generous nature by his actions on this earth, “for you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 8:9). The generosity of the Holy Spirit also manifests itself daily as it fills, comforts, and directs us. God truly is generous.

The source of generosity is love: “God so loved the world that he gave his only [begotten] Son” (John 3:16). Can you imagine a more generous gift than this? Not only did God give us the life of Jesus Christ, but we are also created in the image of God and the Beloved Son: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). By that very definition then, we identify the potential of our true nature.

Every choice we make can be instrumental in developing our true nature, an opportunity to express the generous love of the Divine within. Giving and sharing are acts of love and are found in the initial creation of the universe. Sharing generously is not an act of indebtedness, but rather an act of sacrifice. The biblical understanding of sacrifice is not to give up something but more exactly to make *every* act of our lives

sacred. As such, when the Macedonians “gave themselves first to the Lord” (II Corinthians 8:5), they presented their “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your [reasonable service]” (Romans 12:1). Generosity, then, is to give as freely as we have received (see Matthew 10:8/10:7 IV) with love as the center of our response: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

Humans have been given the great gift of agency, which allows us to choose according to our receptivity to divine grace. The *receiving* fully and gratefully of God’s grace is the seed of our own generosity, nourished by our love for God. This fits our understanding of stewardship as “the response of my people to the ministry of my Son” (Doctrine and Covenants 147:5) and highlights that when grace fully penetrates our heart and our soul, then a generous response is the natural and most appropriate response to God’s grace.

The initial choice to make a generous financial response to God’s grace leads us to yet another decision: whether to believe in the assurance that there is “enough and to spare” (D. and C. 101:2f), which leads to a life filled with generosity. We live in a secular world that professes scarcity by encouraging accumulation, but our faith in the assurance of abundant love can be life changing: “The hope of generosity is that it will, eventually, create an inclusive circle, an encompassing sphere of mutuality and reciprocity.”<sup>1</sup> We have seen and experienced the generosity of God through the gifts of creation, the Only Begotten, and the sustenance and guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are true gifts and are nonextinguishable. “The true gift replenishes itself even as it is passed along. These are gifts which however widely they are shared by all...remain nevertheless undiminished and possess the same super-fullness. They are not lessened by being partaken. Indeed, they pour out all the more generously.”<sup>2</sup>

Priesthood’s responsibility is primarily to encourage people to discover and accept the gift of generosity and acknowledge the Divine that is already within them. The Divine has already reminded us that seeing examples of love and generosity is the most effective means of communication. The

opportunity of priesthood, leading the way and sharing the struggle of making choices that demonstrate *being* generous, is worthy of the very best of our time, talent, and treasure: “All should consecrate of their talents, abilities, and substance for the prosecution of the great work intrusted to us” (D. and C. 132:3b).

## Receiving First

Scripture guides us in our discipleship: “Stewardship is the response of my people to the ministry of my Son and is required alike of all those who seek to build the kingdom” (D. and C. 147:5a). As disciples, we understand our stewardship of time, giftedness, and resources as our response to God’s gifts of grace and love expressed to us in the life of Jesus Christ. Our stewardship is a personal response to God. It is also a way to meet the needs of a growing church ministry, locally and globally.

Scripture emphasizes that stewardship is a holistic process involving all of life. Joseph Smith Jr. presented inspired counsel to the church in September 1830 stating, “...all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal” (D. and C. 28:9a). Our church recognizes that all things are spiritual, including the physical or temporal aspects of life. Thus our stewardship is more than giving on Sunday morning or offering a prayer before a meal. As disciples and stewards, we acknowledge God in every minute of our day and in every aspect of our living.

Agency is one of the generous gifts God gives to us. Agency is our ability to choose freely how we respond to God’s infinite love and grace. Using our agency wisely allows us to manage our time, giftedness, and resources to benefit our personal, family, congregational, and community life. More specifically, our stewardship of financial resources is an important commitment to bringing about God’s kingdom. This material primarily focuses on our financial response as disciples. Inspired counsel encourages us in our sharing:

Let my word be preached to the bruised and the broken-hearted as well as those who are enmeshed in sin, long-

ing to repent and follow me. Let the truths of my gospel be proclaimed as widely and as far as the dedication of the Saints, especially through the exercise of their temporal stewardship, will allow. My Spirit is reaching out to numerous souls even now and there are many who will respond if you, my people, will bear affirmative testimony of my love and my desires for all to come unto me.

—D. and C. 153:9a–b

Our generosity sets the pace for our living out the Community of Christ mission: “We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.” The following six principles guide us in our stewardship of resources:

1. A disciple practices generosity as a spiritual discipline in response to God’s grace and love.

2. A disciple is faithful in response to Christ’s ministry.

3. A disciple’s financial response, while unique to individual circumstances, expresses love of God, neighbor, creation, and oneself.

4. A disciple shares generously through tithing so that others may experience God’s generosity.

5. A disciple saves wisely in order to create a better tomorrow for self, family, the church’s mission, and the world.

6. A disciple spends responsibly as a commitment to live in health and harmony with God and the world.

## **Share through Tithing**

Tithing is a concept deeply rooted in scripture. It is our gift to God in response to God’s generous gifts of grace and love to us. Generosity comes from a spirit of thankfulness within us, not from imposed formulas and rules. We share what we have because we want to. We share what we receive first from God. Therefore, a disciple asks, “How much tithing can I hope to share?” rather than, “How much should I give?”

Tithing is based on the biblical principle of sharing our firstfruits with God. This means tithing is the disciple’s response of thanksgiving and is given before we spend or save from our income. In the Bible the word “tithe” means a tenth part of what one owns or receives. Tithing, according to scrip-

tural principles, is the act of sharing 10 percent of our income with God. As disciples we honor what we have received from God by reaching toward sharing 10 percent or more through Mission and Community Tithes: “Let whoever is of a generous heart bring the Lord’s offering” (Exodus 35:5).

Our **Mission Tithes** go primarily to World, Mission Center, and Congregation Ministries. Through them we support world and local missions that will “[l]et the truths of my gospel be proclaimed as widely and as far as the dedication of the Saints, especially through the exercise of their temporal stewardship, will allow” (D. and C. 153:9a). Mission Tithes are a significant portion of a generous disciple’s response. By sharing equally with Congregation and World Ministries, the disciple shares in the mission of the church both on a local and global level. Examples of World Tithes include World Ministries, Oblation, World Hunger, and other designated “world” contributions. Examples of Local Mission Tithes include Congregation Ministries, Building Fund, and other designated local contributions.

Disciples generally give Mission Tithes during worship services. In our home congregation, we can obtain offering envelopes from our congregational financial officer. Offering envelopes allow us to designate funds for World Ministries and Congregation Ministries, as well as other funds such as the Building Fund or Oblation Fund. Additionally, some disciples share through direct contributions sent to mission centers or world headquarters. Estate and financial planning ministers at world headquarters are also available, on request, to provide assistance in planning other ways for you to share Mission and Community Tithes.

**Community Tithes** represent a disciple’s response to church-affiliated organizations and other charitable nonprofit organizations that are “...in the forefront...recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives” (D. and C. 151:9). Generous disciples may share a portion of their tithing directly with institutions such as Graceland University, Outreach International, Outreach Europe, Restoration Trail Foundation, SaintsCare, World Accord, and other charitable nonprofit organizations.

Additionally, we may find appropriate opportunities at various points in our life to share our financial support in other ways. This, too, helps us pursue the mission of the church and our discipleship. This may include sharing food with a neighbor who is experiencing hard times or helping a friend pay an unexpected medical bill. All of these are part of our generous sharing.

## **Save for the Future**

The principle of saving is an expression of hope for the future. Disciples save in order to create a better tomorrow for themselves, their heirs, the church, and the world. Through planning and careful management, many have found saving 10 percent of their income is an effective way to prepare for the future: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28). Disciples save for a number of reasons: major purchases, unexpected needs, vacations, retirement funds, college funds, and estate building for family and church. Indeed, disciples can continue their generous response beyond this life by making provisions in their estates for the ongoing ministries of the church.

## **Spend Responsibly**

The principle of spending responsibly is a commitment by disciples to use the remainder of their income to live in health and harmony as they support family, personal needs, giftedness, and interests. Wise and prayerful planning and management of these remaining resources brings financial wholeness in life. How we spend our money is part of our personal witness of Christ: “It is incumbent upon the Saints...to be in the world but not of it, living and acting honestly and honorably before God and in the sight of all men, using the things of this world in the manner designed of God, that the places where they occupy may shine as Zion...” (D. and C. 128:8b, c). Disciples spend responsibly in all areas of life, including housing, health care, transportation, food, clothing, recreation, and personal development.

## Live as a Generous Disciple

Generosity is one of the ways we can both honor our heritage and our call to live as prophetic people who help shape the future God has envisioned for all creation. A Disciple's Generous Response is a whole life commitment we choose to make in response to God's wonderful generosity. The role of priesthood is to model this whole life commitment and to share with others the joys of living life generously. Priesthood members are called to preach and teach the abundant nature of God's love and grace that is available to each one. But the call does not end there. It is fulfilled as the priesthood guides and supports disciples in generously responding to that love and grace. The hope is that all disciples, with each breath of life, will more fully express gratitude toward God through generous sharing, wise saving, and responsible spending. Understanding our stewardship at the personal, congregational, and denominational levels will bless us spiritually and grow us as a community, so that we can "provide more fully and joyfully for the great work to which we are called" and engaged (see D. and C. 154:5b).

Additional information and recommended resources are available on the Presiding Bishopric Web page: <http://www.CofChrist.org/bishop/>.

## Notes

1. Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 150.
2. *Ibid.*, 157.



## **Chapter 9**

# **Historical Development**

### **A Divine Calling**

Our religious heritage, continued in the church today, affirms the creative acts of God intervening in human history, calling individuals and communities into being. From Abraham and Sarah in Ur of the Chaldees to the present time, God has continued to work in the world to effect divine purposes. The form of God's call changes with the conditions of the world in which humans live: from the burning bush to the still small voice of inspiration given a local pastor. The relatively simple organization of the first Christian community developed, under divine direction, into more comprehensive structures through which the ministries of the church met human needs in each generation.

God issues the call in various ways and to a variety of people. However, the call and the cause for which they are sent does not change. Some perspectives concerning the call to priesthood ministry are presented here. They offer the testimony of the constant, unchanging call of God to assist in the reconciling ministries for which priesthood are sent. They comment on the ways this constant call has been handled in the varied communities of disciples that have been the church throughout the ages.

### **Christ Is the Center**

At the center of Christianity stands the person of Christ, the Word that became flesh. Christ's mission was redemptive, and his message, the good news of the gospel, was the trans-

formation of human beings into disciples and communities into the beloved kingdom of God. This transformation occurs through love:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

—Matthew 22:36–38 IV

Today the church seeks to live out the mission in a twofold way: to proclaim Jesus Christ, and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. This two-fold mission is our attempt to respond to the divine call and to the human need for companionship on the journey of discipleship. The effective inter-relationship of these two, through love, is at the heart of the Christian gospel.

How did Christ go about spreading the gospel of the kingdom? Beyond choosing twelve apostles, did Christ establish a church and institute a priesthood structure? These questions have been of particular importance within our faith movement, often referred to as the Restoration movement.

The Gospels, in delineating the work of Christ, deal not so much with *how* as with *why*. The account is testimonial. For that reason, as Arthur Oakman wrote, “The New Testament is not a textbook in church organization.” Certainly there are hints of developing structure but no definitive statement. What we do get is the spiritual conviction of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus tested that conviction in a question to his disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The question became more specific, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter’s answer, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” finds confirmation in the hearts of all those through the ages who have been similarly touched by the presence of the Divine. The conviction comes not through “flesh and blood” but through “my Father who is in heaven” (see Matthew 16:13ff). Thus the physical presence of Christ takes secondary importance to the presence of Christ’s Spirit in our lives. It is that central experience that leads to the vision of the kingdom of God to which

the Gospel writers most urgently testified. Jesus presented his followers with a choice: for or against the kingdom of God.

## **The Calling of Twelve Apostles**

It is significant that as Jesus began his earthly ministry he called to himself twelve “apostles” who lived and worked with him. It was to them he entrusted the continuance of his message: “And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 18–19).

To be *apostolic* was one of the gifts of the Spirit given to the church. The office of apostle was bestowed on those whose commitments and receptiveness to the Divine qualified them for this special calling. The apostles symbolized the pervasive power of witness inherent in the total fellowship of the church. It was in this sense that Paul wrote, “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:28).

The church was true to its apostolic calling as its members bore witness of God’s presence in their lives. That call through the movement of centuries has not changed. The call to discipleship and witness is still the most significant call that any of us can receive. As F. Henry Edwards wrote:

There is a sense in which all members of the church are ministers. The New Testament evidences nothing of any restriction of the truth to any inner circle of the specially elect. The glory of the apostolic church was that “from the least to the greatest” all might know “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8)... We sometimes forget this basic “priesthood of all believers.”... This principle of our common priesthood has been re-enunciated in this present dispensation in the instruction that “all are called according to the gifts of God unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 119:8b). This call to sainthood is a call to ministry in a general but very important sense, so there

is nothing strange in the references in modern revelation to “the office of member.”

—Doctrine and Covenants 104:5

The early Christian church, which included the apostle Paul, was more concerned with *offering* ministry than with particular ministerial *office*. Ministry is at the heart of the gospel. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10) and “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26, 28).

## **A Life of Ministry for Others**

By example as well as by teaching, Jesus showed us that the “good news” is to be a life of ministry for the sake of others. This mission was shared with disciples in that early day, and it continues to be the legacy of the disciples of all ages. The role of servant as portrayed so marvelously by Jesus himself stands forth indelibly written on the pages of human history. Each person whose life has ever been touched by the hand of Christ has at the same instant of healing felt the gentle encouragement to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Jesus showed us that the call to be witnesses of the gospel is a call to all, however lowly or exalted, to be transformed through love. It is a call to *receive* the gospel, to *live* the gospel, to *be* the gospel for the sake of others. Most significantly, it comes not as a commission only but with divine assurance: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Ministry is to be offered in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ. This promise guarantees that the Lord will be with the servant as the ministerial task is being fulfilled. It is in response to the ministry of the Holy Spirit—Jesus’ gift to the disciples as Comforter in his stead—that the call and commission comes. This same Spirit guides us in what we are to remember, say, and do.

Human life finds meaning and purpose in the awareness of God’s love extended most graciously and in the willingness to share that love with others in the same gracious manner. Ministry comes by the Holy Spirit, and it is to be given in response

to that same Spirit. No one is beyond the reach of the grace of such a loving God. God is indeed no respecter of persons, and therefore all are loved, redeemed, and called to the task. Jesus showed us this unyielding love for all of humankind in his earthly ministry when he ministered to the Samaritan and the woman at the well. Because he ministered freely to all, many testified of God's love and gracious acceptance of Jesus' healing ministry and, subsequently, of the unmistakable call that came to them through that experience with the Lord. They, too, were called to serve.

## **Jewish Origins**

Because the disciples of the Messiah were Jews, for a time they followed Jewish law and custom. In the beginning they had comparatively little institutional identity of their own. Worship in the temple was usual, though the followers of Christ often gathered for "love feasts," the breaking of bread together, and the sharing of the amazing new power that had touched their lives. Informality characterized the nature of their meetings, with no great necessity for detailed organization. Originally they were still Jews who practiced Judaism, but with the understanding that the hoped-for Messiah had indeed come.

In time, people outside Judaism were drawn to this new movement and disputes arose over Jewish law between the Jews and the so-called Hellenists (non-Jewish Greeks). Congregations split on the issue of whether circumcision, for instance, was required of non-Jewish Christians. Believers in Jerusalem remained predominantly Jewish; those in Antioch were mostly Greek. Paul came into conflict with Peter and the "circumcision party" over what aspects of Jewish law were to be invoked. For a while Paul's whole credibility as a minister was at stake. Sometimes one group tried to undermine the other. Paul preached one way, but the Judaizers came after him (as in Galatia) and preached another way. Needless to say, that disturbed Paul. Great issues were at stake, and change did not come easily. The process was both difficult and painful, particularly for those who had known Jesus in person. The feeling

of “we know better than you” was hard to overcome. It required humility in the face of changing circumstances. That is always difficult for those who are committed to a perceived truth that is limited. Eventually, congregations became known simply as “Christian” and lost their specific Jewish affiliation.

## **Changing Structures to Meet Needs**

In all of this we see institutional forms changing to meet the needs of the people. Structure as such was not sacrosanct in the early Christian church. The admonition “Rise up and experiment upon my word” found practical expression as these early pioneers in the Christian way tried to find the means of most effectively incorporating and spreading the Christian message. Increasingly, the original, fairly loose structure of the Christian congregations was replaced by more highly organized ones. While the early New Testament church was distinctly Spirit-directed and led by gifted people who freely used their giftedness without restrictions of polity and hierarchy, the church soon had to deal with the problems of a growing institution.

First, there were distinctively different kinds of roles for the leadership in the early Christian church as compared with the practices of Judaism. The Old Testament reveals a priesthood that stood between God and humanity, but the New Testament describes leaders who were from among the people and who stood with them. It has been a problem historically for Christian churches to determine which of these two traditions they would prefer to institutionalize in their own experience. Some appear to be primarily oriented toward the Old Testament intermediary model for priesthood; the New Testament servant role is the preferred model for others. Such issues had to be faced by the first-century church as well.

Second, priesthood was a division of labor that emerged out of need. Each congregation developed the structure that best suited its particular situation. For example, chapter six of Acts records the calling of seven “men of good standing, full of the Spirit of wisdom,” who were subsequently ordained by the apostles. They were called as a response to specific needs in the growing church: “Now during those days, when the disciples

were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.” The twelve said to the disciples

It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.—Acts 6:1–4

A third illustration of forms developing in response to need is seen in the role of congregational leader. The “overseer” or presiding officer of a congregation was one of the first to be designated. Soon problems arose over terminology, a debate that was to have repercussions for centuries to come. To acknowledge the truth of the situation, we need only be aware that the very names used to identify the priesthood roles were themselves functionally descriptive. For example, the term “deacon” comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, which means “servant.” The term “bishop” comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, which means “overseer.” The term “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one who is sent.”

Because the term “elders” was applied in Judaism to those who were the traditional overseers of the Jewish communities, it was a simple matter for the Christian congregations that came from Jewish origins to accept a similar terminology for similar functions. However, other congregations began to use the term “bishop” for the ones who presided over their groups. This is reflected in the way Paul called the elders of Ephesus together as recorded in Acts 20. To these leaders he said, “Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). The word “overseers” in this text represents the only time in the New Testament that the King James scholars translated *episkopos* to read overseer rather than bishop, as was done on the other four occasions where the same word appears in that early English translation of the Bible.

In early times there was a natural confusion of roles, functions, and titles of offices, due both to communication difficul-

ties and the practical necessities of congregations having to see to the effective carrying out of needed ministries. Organization and systematic consistency could and did come later.

## Centuries-long Development

By the time of the Puritan revolution in seventeenth-century England, these terms had taken on a life of their own. Church government was a major issue among the many sects that developed. Should the church be governed by an *episkopos* or bishop like the Anglicans, by a presbyter (elder) like the Presbyterians, or should the determination be made by individual congregations as the Congregationalists? The subject was not to be treated lightly and gained momentum through time.

In the tradition of the Restoration movement, however, a form of priesthood emerged in response to the needs of the growing movement and divine inspiration. The need for ministry was expressed through various offices and duties that have continued to inform us in our theology of priesthood: “The rise of the church of Christ in these last days...by the will and commandments of God...which commandments were given to Joseph Smith, Jr., who was called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church” (D. and C. 17:1a–b).

To say that structure was a gradual development in the early congregations and that priesthood office did not in practice emerge full-blown right away is not to underrate its importance. Divine involvement and commission are present everywhere. Whether it be Joseph Smith who was called to be a first elder and apostle, or Saul of Tarsus who wrote that he was “an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Galatians 1:1), no one may simply seek such an honor or responsibility but must be “called of God as was Aaron.” As F. Henry Edwards noted,

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the divine element in the sending forth of the priesthood.

When God wanted John to preach and baptize he called

him and sent him to do that work...When he wanted a special group of forerunners to prepare the way before him, he called the seventy... (Luke 10:1–3). When he wanted Paul and Barnabas he called them by the Holy Spirit... (Acts 13:3–4). When he wanted elders to guide the church at Ephesus, he called them by the Spirit and set them in their places (Acts 20:28).<sup>2</sup>

The culmination of such calls to ministry comes in the rite of ordination. “The primary value of ordination is that it makes clear that the authority of the minister is not his own.”<sup>3</sup> Once a person has accepted a call to priesthood responsibility, the individual is truly the servant of the Divine engaged in a special mission. As a representative of the Divine each has access to divine empowerment as long as Christ is at the center of life. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). The empowerment that comes through ordination is for the purpose of ministry. It is an apostolic call to special function, not just within the church structure but to the world.

## **The Call to Today’s Church**

The call that comes to the contemporary church is to effectively combine the *ecclesia*—the calling forth of each member—with priesthood structure. The particular joy and power that accompany the beginnings of a movement can easily be lost and bogged down in ritual and habit. We can forget what it means to be firsthand Christians and become second- or thirdhand Christians. The Restoration is, among other things, a reemphasis on God’s concern for humankind in the present day and a renewed recognition of the importance of the Divine-human encounter. Such restoration, as we have seen, is always related to ministry. It is to be restorers in the sense President Wallace B. Smith enunciated in his sermon to the 1984 World Conference:

Who will be the restorers? Are people willing to live close enough to the teachings of Jesus that their faith will become a compelling and powerful testimony of what true love, radical love, can really do? This is what restoration means to me—a willingness to build and heal and reconcile.<sup>4</sup>

In effective group activity, however, some have to be leaders to point direction, to channel energies, to make certain that all facets of the work receive attention. For these purposes priesthood is essential. In addition to the general call to all members comes a divine choice for specialized ministry. Such choice is in fulfillment of need, a Divine/human recognition of work to be done. It was such a divine initiative that sent Christ. As Christ was sent, so in turn are Christ's disciples also sent: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).

Priesthood ministry, though specialized, does not replace the call to discipleship—to be firsthand Christians in the most complete sense. The challenge to the contemporary church is to avoid letting the original dynamic encounter of the movement fade and be lost in the prerogatives of office or in careless neglect of the individual right to the grace of God. To combine ecclesia with structure, to know doctrine not as lifeless dogma but as love and power, can be a truly restoring experience. The attempt to slavishly follow the structure perceived as necessary and helpful in an earlier time and to forget that structure must always follow function is to lose our opportunity of ministry.

To be both in the world and not of it requires understandings of sociological and historical dynamics as well as the eternal purposes of the Divine. To be sensitive to this interrelationship and to meet its challenge has always been the call of the Christian church.

Surely this is the call to a prophetic church—one for which every member has a responsibility. Indeed the early Christian church had a major lesson to teach us that finds its expression here. Specific congregational or priesthood structures will, though important, be secondary to proclaiming Jesus Christ and promoting communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

## Notes

1. F. Henry Edwards, *Authority and Spiritual Power* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1956), 21.
2. *Ibid.*, 23.
3. *Ibid.*, 24.
4. Wallace B. Smith, "Draw Near with a True Heart," *Saints Herald* 131, no. 9 (May 1, 1984): 19.

## Chapter 10

# Authority

### Priesthood and the Church

The Community of Christ believes that God acted through divine initiative to establish the church in modern times. Part of God's actions in the establishment of the church was to provide for a divinely authorized ministry. There is vested in the church a priesthood authority to represent God through celebrating the sacraments, ministering to people, and seeking to establish God's reign of justice and peace in the world. In 1832 the church received the following instruction:

the Lord confirmed a priesthood also upon Aaron and his seed throughout all their generations, which priesthood also continueth and abideth forever, with the priesthood which is after the holiest order of God. And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.—Doctrine and Covenants 83:3a–b

It is our belief that authority has been granted to the church and that God works through it in ministering to people both now and forever. The authority held by the church and exercised by its priesthood has its basis in many facets of the church's life.

### Legal Authority

When considering authority most people probably think of legal authority first—the legal right to act for another or to command or exercise dominion over others. Legal authority

is bestowed through ordination after one has been called and the church has approved the ordination by vote. The authority that is exercised by ordained ministers is defined in the duties of the office to which they are called and ordained.

Under national governments throughout the world, humans are subject to authority that is imposed by law. Absolute compliance is often required. Subjection to authority within the church is modified by the fact that membership in the church is voluntary. We can discipline or disfellowship unruly members but we cannot compel them to obey church rules.

There are times when legal authority must be employed with full power. There should be no pride, selfishness, vanity, oppression, greed, or personal ambition used in this exercise of authority. However, the one who is appointed to take charge of a meeting is expected to do so—and must do so—if the work of the church is to be done. Someone must make decisions, and the government of the church provides that those in various priesthood offices have the right to lead in ways prescribed as the legal rights of that office. The application of church law must sometimes be interpreted in specific cases. This authority to interpret rests with those who are called to minister through administrative responsibility.

Traveling and supervising ministers occasionally find situations in which they must use their legal authority to protect the church and its people. Legal authority must be exercised sometimes when it is necessary to withdraw ministerial authority from one who acts in ways unbecoming of a minister.

Legal authority applied for disciplinary purposes, however, should be used only as a last resort. The labor of love and kindly persuasion should be employed as far as possible. Reconciliation should always be the hope of the church and the goal of any attempt to work with one who is struggling with ministerial responsibilities. In all human interactions the principles of reconciliation and repentance should be primary. If persons can be led to see the value of church policies and procedures, and persuaded to take the right course of action voluntarily, we have succeeded in the exercise of our authority on a very high level. We are told that “all things shall be done by common consent in the church” (D. and C. 25:1b). This is one of the wisest and finest laws of the

church. The idea of common consent does not preclude the need for moral persuasion and loving-kindness that may modify people's actions.

There are situations, however, in which moral persuasion is rebuffed and the maintenance of order requires the use of legal authority. The law of the land in many nations respects the legal authority of the church and its representatives in some acts such as marriage ceremonies, or the right of the church to regulate its internal affairs. In these the church is held accountable for the actions of its representatives.

We believe God has established the church and granted it legal authority to act to bring about divine purposes. We have felt God's power at work in the church and are assured that God is accepting us and participating with us in this work. We have a testimony that God has called us into service. We are assured of the authority resident within the church to do those things that bring ministry to people and build the kingdom of God. The legal authority that is given to ordained ministers is limited to the right to function within the church and to those ways in which the church may be recognized to function for society.

God, however, is not limited to working within the confines of the Community of Christ. God is at work in many places in the world and grants to those chosen the authority to accomplish the task they are called to do. It is not wise for us to become concerned about what authority others may have. It is important to know that we function with authority given by God through the church.

## **Moral Authority**

Moral authority is an important element in the authority exercised by ordained ministers. This is the authority that comes to a person because of the goodness or moral quality of his or her life. An honest, compassionate, and righteous person carries a quality about his or her life that gives authority far beyond the one who is known to be deceitful, crafty, or untrustworthy.

Part of the authority exercised by Jesus was the goodness and righteousness of his own life. This moral authority

was seen in such situations as when the scribes and Pharisees brought Jesus a woman taken in adultery and stated that Moses commanded such should be stoned. Jesus replied to his questioners, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” and the scriptures record that “When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders” (see John 8:3–11).

This moral right to act is felt by the minister and by the people who receive that ministry. Ordained ministers who do not seek to grow closer to God will seldom be able to provide ministry that will lift up others spiritually. Ministers who are themselves not generous with their resources will rarely be able to be effective at teaching others the spirit of generosity. Priesthood members who are unwilling to forgive or be reconciled to a brother or sister will not be fully authoritative in the ministry of reconciliation.

There is a moral authority that grows out of the quality of the life and actions of ordained ministers. People often reflect this when they say, “Is this right? Is this good? Will this be fair?” The letter of the law is legal but the spirit of the law reflects moral rightness, and this carries an authority that is very important.

## **Spiritual Authority**

At the time of his ascension Jesus promised, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). This, of course, points particularly to Pentecost, but in the larger sense God empowers the church and those called through the gift of the Holy Spirit. An important element in ministry should be the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit expanding and using those abilities, talents, and skills that may be latent within the minister.

It is unfortunate that many people think of spiritual authority as being primarily exercised in such gifts as speaking in tongues, prophesying, or healing the sick. While it is true that these gifts of the Spirit sometimes occur, it is often the case that the power of the Spirit is present and quickening ministers in much more subtle ways. Through the touch of the Holy Spirit, those ordained to the priesthood many times will

be able to speak publicly, offer insightful prayer, care for those in need, and perform other ministries in ways they never supposed possible. Occasionally it becomes necessary for ordained ministers to perform tasks that call for gifts they feel they do not have. If they will prayerfully do their best they will sometimes find the quickening power of the Holy Spirit giving them insights and abilities to act beyond anything they had felt possible. In a very real sense when they feel that their talents and gifts have been quickened by the Spirit, the ministry has such new dimensions that one may say, “It wasn’t so much me as God working through me that brought the ministry.”

Ministers themselves need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enlighten their minds, quicken their abilities, and increase their love and compassion for those who are in need. They should avoid any attempt to substitute a pseudospirituality for lack of preparation. The Holy Spirit is not a substitute for study but will help those who prayerfully enter into study. Priesthood members should expect the Holy Spirit to bless their ministry with authority as they prayerfully give their best in service to God and the people.

## **The Authority of Competence**

Competence is an indispensable element in priesthood. Legal authority may be given through ordination, but incompetence or lack of discipline make that authority hollow. Priesthood members should study to become skilled in ministry. Each task requires preparation so that the very best service can be given.

The apostle Paul advised Timothy to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15 IV). Similar advice is given to us in contemporary scriptures: “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought, save it was to ask me; but, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind” (D. and C. 9:3a–b).

Authority depends on ministers having the skills, understanding, and insights to be competent in their ministry. Priesthood members should learn the duties of the office

to which they are ordained and make as much preparation as possible to perform the ministries required. They should pursue ongoing development through individual study and courses available from Temple School, Community of Christ Seminary, and other institutions.

Much of this chapter has concerned legal authority to act for God and the church. However, when one considers the authority to effect those conditions in the present age that can assist in bringing about the Peaceable Kingdom on earth, then competence assumes a much more significant role. Ordination in and of itself does not make one an architect capable of drawing up plans for a church building, or knowledgeable regarding finances qualifying one to advise others about financial planning, or skilled in medicine to treat the sick. Ordination to priesthood may well bring a ministerial dimension that supplements and adds to the authority of competence, but in the totality of ministry, skill and competency are essential to true ministerial authority.

## **Priesthood's Relationship to the Church**

Some have accepted priesthood believing that their call from God makes them responsible in their ministry to God only. Perhaps our understanding of this issue would be helped if we remember that God establishes and nurtures the church. God authorizes the church as the body of Christ to minister in Christ's stead. This does not mean that the church is free from sin or error. It does mean that by grace God accepts the immaturity, rebellion, and ignorance of the church as well as the glory. God works with the church through the power of the Holy Spirit to draw it ever nearer to the divine will and to use the church to bring about the salvation of humankind.

Because the church is called to minister in Christ's stead, it may be expected that the Holy Spirit will work in the church to designate individuals for special ministries. The call comes through and for the church, and ordination is authorized by the church through the common consent of the body.

Individuals who are ordained, therefore, are responsible to the church and its administrative officers. They should function in their priesthood as a part of the team. Priesthood mem-

bers are not free to flaunt the church's rules or frustrate the work of the body; when they persist in doing so, they may be removed from the priesthood, and their authority to represent Christ and the church be taken from them. Neither are priesthood members free to engage in activities or styles of living that bring disrepute on the church.

The church has a right to expect that those it authorizes to represent it in the priesthood will affirmatively support and promote the work of the church.

## **Priesthood Is Conferred through Ordination**

Priesthood is conferred through the sacrament of ordination. Authority to function is legally given at that time. Ordination involves the laying on of hands and a prayer of blessing and pronouncement that specifies the office of the priesthood conferred. The act of laying on of hands is symbolic and gives a tangible expression to the granting of intangible power and authority through the Holy Spirit. In reality, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a divine gift. The scriptures state that one being ordained "is to be ordained by the power of the Holy Ghost which is in the one who ordains" (D. and C. 17:12b).

The scriptures and church law require that all ordinations in organized jurisdictions of the church be approved by the vote of the church. However, in emergencies or in unorganized fields certain priesthood members may receive calls and be ordained to some priesthood offices without a vote of the church. This is done after their recommendations have been approved by the proper administrative authorities, as indicated by the following:

No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church; but the presiding elders, traveling bishops, high councilors, high priests, and elders, may have the privilege of ordaining, where there is no branch of the church, that a vote may be called.

—D. and C. 17:16

The Bylaws of the Community of Christ also state:

The basic principles pertaining to priesthood calls are that all calls shall be initiated by appropriate administrative officers, shall receive necessary administrative approvals, shall be presented to the candidate for acceptance, and shall be approved by an appropriate conference of members.<sup>1</sup>

## **Statement on Authority**

Joseph Smith III stated the following about priesthood authority:

The powers of the priesthood...are conferred for no other purpose than the salvation of man, and are continued only in the just exercise of them in the pursuit of this object; hence any act of any man called unto this calling performed with any other intent, or attended with a different result is not authorized of God, and hence does not bind the powers of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, Joseph Smith Jr. wrote that

the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled, only upon the principles of righteousness, that they may be conferred upon us, it is true, but when we undertake to cover our sins, to gratify our pride, vain ambition, or to exercise dominion or compulsion over the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness; behold the heavens withdraw themselves, the Spirit of God is grieved, then amen to the priesthood, or to the authority of that man; behold ere he is aware, he is left to kick against the prick; to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.<sup>3</sup>

The Bylaws of the Community of Christ also state the following:

The government of the church is by divine authority through priesthood. It should be noted that the government of the church is through priesthood, not by priesthood. The distinction is important. Ministers must first of

all be disciples. Disciples are those who seek to transform this world into the kingdom of God and Christ. In no other way can their claim to divine authority become rich and meaningful.<sup>4</sup>

## **Priesthood Members Who Are Employed by the Church**

Some responsibilities in the work of the church require those who perform them to give full-time attention to these tasks. The general officers of the church have more than they can do in the work of the church alone and do not have other employment. Traveling and supervising ministers must give full time to their tasks. The church, therefore, employs some people to work full time for the church. They are authorized representatives of the church according to their assignment or the terms of their employment, but when these persons are also members of the priesthood, their authority as priesthood members is not altered.

### **Notes**

1. Bylaws of the Community of Christ, Article III, Section 3 as found in *World Conference Resolutions*, 2002 Edition (Independence, Missouri: Herald House).
2. Joseph Smith III, *Saints' Herald* 24, no. 11 (June 1, 1877): 168.
3. Joseph Smith Jr., *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 9 (July 1840): 131–132.
4. Bylaws of the Community of Christ, Article III, Section 2.



## **Chapter 11**

# **Ministerial Ethics**

### **Ethical Concerns of the Minister**

Leading people into the presence of God is the primary work of a priesthood member. This is done through worship, which is at the center of the Christian way of life. Therefore, sound ethics result from insights gained through worship. Under the impress of the Holy Spirit, one is led to understand life as God would have us see it. The minister will always be deeply concerned with the moral actions, motives, and principles that grow out of knowledge of God's nature and purpose. This understanding helps us be aware of those patterns of life that are in harmony with the will of God. Society refers to these actions and principles in terms of right and wrong.

The standards of right and wrong are ethical standards. The ethics of discipleship are the application of the fundamental principles of the gospel. Ethics grow out of the spirit and way of life taught by Jesus. The foundation of Christian ethics is found in the words of Jesus. In quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39). Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). On another occasion Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). This so-called Golden Rule is expressed in slightly different words by many religions. Such values have formed the foundations for the ethical rules of most societies. The ethical codes and laws of society are helpful. They make

the standards of conduct more understandable and easily applied.

## **The Character of the Ordained**

It is the calling of disciples to live their religion at all times. Ethical living is not so much the result of avoiding wrong as the consistent, affirmative action toward worthy ends. A life filled with good influences and striving for good provides little opportunity for negative, destructive influences to find a place. The apostle Paul supported this view: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). In this way the minister teaches by example the precepts of God.

Every minister soon becomes aware of the high standards expected. These involve such areas as honesty, work patterns, business affairs, family life, trustworthiness, and cleanliness of speech and body, as well as the quality of ministry given. A minister must live by the standards that are understood to be right and good. A minister is called to teach Christian ethical standards to the people both by word and example.

Priesthood is concerned with such things as the development of talents, attitudes toward temporal things, use of time, consideration of family, relationship with the church, association with other ministers, and the obligation to humankind. The minister should inspire confidence and respect, and build close relationships with people, but must establish boundaries that prevent overfamiliarity. In the midst of all these relationships, priesthood members must determine to keep sacred the trust placed in them by the church, the people, and God. As they are led by the Spirit of God they can be particularly sensitive to right and wrong, appreciative of the value of goodwill, and aware of the sacredness of personality.

Christian love, purity, humility, fidelity, hope, joy, and peace are among the qualities of the Lord’s ministers. According to scripture, “No one can assist in this work, except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things whatsoever shall be intrusted to his care” (D. and C. 11:4b). Ordained persons are called at all times to take their place within the actual social environment of the people they serve. They are called to work with people where

they are, thus promoting a better personal life, and through it a better social order.

## **Ethics in the Home**

Ministers usually find their first opportunity to express wholesome Christian ethical relationships in their own homes. Love is more than an inner feeling; it is to act lovingly. Personal unity and wholeness in the Spirit of God is a corporate matter and involves one's relationships with other people. The exercise of integrity, patience, loyalty, self-sacrifice, truth, honesty, thrift, industry, temperance, and justice involves these relationships.

Spiritual qualities and social graces cultivated under the Spirit of God provide the most affirmative foundation for happy families. Honor, fidelity, tolerance, and humor become essential parts of a wholesome Christian home. The spirit of a priesthood member's calling will be reflected in her or his home. Children who grow up in the home where the spirit of ministry from a priesthood member exists will tend to develop those qualities and sensitivities involved in that priesthood office. The minister's home will be an example to others whether or not it is intended to be. Maturity, love, a sense of permanence, and mutual exercise of personal agency are qualities looked for. At the same time, such homes will exclude things that are detrimental to spiritual development.

The home is the foundation of citizenship. The best citizens are those who actively participate in creative living. Conformity to Christian standards is a choice, not an invasion of privilege. It is a choice based on recognition of the values to be found through Jesus Christ.

## **The Community and Ethical Concerns**

A minister should take an active interest in the community. God works through priesthood to participate in the life of the world. The choice of a person's point of service will depend on one's awareness of the opportunities and needs of the community.

The minister's desire to infuse the ministries of redemption into the general life of the community results from an ap-

preciation of his or her redemption through Jesus Christ. The minister ought to touch the life of the community in a way that lifts people up and gives them hope. Much of priesthood ministry is directed to the church. Success requires cooperation with other ministers, acceptance of one's place on the team, and compassion for every member. Ministers should, however, recognize that ministry is not alone to the church but to the world, which God is trying to redeem. They need to participate affirmatively in those good causes that uplift and enrich community life. In more recent times God has emphasized this need for community outreach: "You who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives" (D. and C. 151:9). While this instruction is not limited to the priesthood, it certainly does apply to them. Ministers should lead the church as they personally respond to this instruction.

## **Affirmative Ministry**

Disciplined lives, concerned hearts, and firm beliefs are affirmative. When efforts toward righteousness become negative rather than affirmative, they are often destructive.

A good person can become the victim of his or her own prejudices. The severe conscience that demands self-denial and obedience to stifling rules may do more harm than good. Such an attitude denies the innocent and wholesome pleasures of life through which recreation becomes re-creational.

Extremism is evidenced by the person with these characteristics of conscience:

1. the *meddlesome conscience*, which cannot mind its own business but tries to make everyone's business its own;
2. the *anxious conscience*, which finds it difficult to believe the best about anyone; and
3. the *dogmatic conscience*, which refuses to listen to chords played on the heartstrings of its associates. That person's life is ordered by a group of clichés that do not require thought, only repetition.

Such puritanical approaches are usually more destructive than helpful.

## **Liberalism and Conservatism**

“Liberalism” and “conservatism” are two greatly abused terms. Frequently they are used in the most extreme sense by persons who wish to discredit someone else. A liberal is sometimes erroneously thought to be without any guiding principles or moral sense. On the other hand, a conservative is sometimes erroneously described as a reactionary who clings to the familiar and rejects change without regard to reason or intelligence. No doubt there are extremists to whom these distorted definitions apply. It is obvious, however, that such labels can do violence to a great many people.

There is a wide variety of definitions for the term *liberal*, but in its affirmative sense it usually means, when applied to people, that they more readily accept progress or reform than others, that they are tolerant, favoring giving others freedom of action and personal belief, or that they are relatively free from prejudice or bigotry. Liberal people tend not to be bound as tightly to traditional ideas or practices as other people.

By comparison when we describe people as *conservative* we generally mean that they want to preserve existing conditions or institutions. Such individuals prefer gradual change rather than abrupt shifts in society. They are more cautious in accepting the new or different.

Few people are either liberal or conservative. Most of us are mixtures, especially in practice, striving to produce change where the existing situation is undesirable and to preserve those values and conditions that are attractive, useful, and that we believe to be right. As ordained ministers, our calling is to be neither liberal nor conservative in the extreme sense, but to encourage change as prompted through discernment, and to preserve continuity so that enduring values are not discarded.

## **Ethics in Church Administration**

There are certain ethical standards and procedures that are considered basic to good church administration. These promote

good ministerial relationships. Many church policies and procedures have grown out of these ethical standards. For example, a wise and cooperative minister secures the approval of administrative officers in any jurisdiction before performing baptisms or weddings. Such a minister makes proper arrangements before going into an area to provide ministry, and always recognizes the administrative leadership. Priesthood assignments should be fulfilled promptly. Ministers should make adequate preparation for ministerial assignments. Priesthood should acquaint themselves with administrative policies and procedures and be careful to follow them. This means that the minister with new life in Christ is concerned with doing the divine will and reflecting divine attributes. She or he tries to live by the ethics of the kingdom of God. Every ordained minister should seek to become skillful in performing the work of their office, study diligently and regularly, and cultivate the Christian graces.

## **Ethics and One's Devotional Life**

Ministers should maintain a living faith in God and Jesus Christ. They should maintain faith in the divine mission of the church. Such a living faith is maintained through personal devotion and group worship. Worship experiences that include attention to the church's world mission will strengthen the minister by putting local needs and conditions in a context of world vision. Convictions of the divine call to minister are strengthened and enhanced through prayer, study, and service. Such convictions will strengthen the faith of those served.

## **Ethics and Good Character and Habits**

Priesthood members must maintain a good reputation, fine character, and cleanliness of mind, body, and habits. The proper basis for a sound reputation is a sound character.

The World Conference has produced guidelines on several occasions with reference to the use of intoxicating beverages and tobacco.

[T]his conference deprecates the use of intoxicating drinks (as beverages), and the use of tobacco, and recom-

mends, to all officers of the church, total abstinence.—  
GCR 92 (1868)

[T]his body declares that the use of tobacco is expensive, injurious and filthy, and that it should be discouraged by the ministry.—GCR 217 (1878)

Whereas, The addiction to tobacco is clearly a detriment to the physical and spiritual life of a Christian steward, although such addiction of itself is not a test of membership in the church, therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the Church of Jesus Christ urges its members and all men to live physically and morally in a manner that reflects the image of Christ our Savior, and further be it

*Resolved*, That the church reaffirms in the context of 1964 the counsel given to the church in 1833 that tobacco is not for the body and is not good for man, but is an herb to be used with judgment and skill, and further be it

*Resolved*, That this Conference inform the appropriate officials of our concern about and support for suitable controls over the advertising and use of tobacco and tobacco products.

—WCR 1046 (1964)

It is in this light that addiction to the use of tobacco, intoxicating beverages, or drugs is sufficient grounds for deferring approval of an ordination to any office of the priesthood. It also is a basis for silencing a member of the priesthood where such use persists. 

While traditionally the use of tobacco and intoxicating beverages, or drugs has been among the most common addictions that, ethically, are inappropriate for priesthood, in the present day these vices have expanded. Today the use of drugs, sexual promiscuity, wanton living, greed, carelessness, and irresponsibility are among those habits that commonly destroy people. WCR 1207 (1988), “Task Force on Addictions,” is noteworthy in this respect, responding to the call in Doctrine and Covenants Section 156 to build a temple and develop ministries that will engender wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. The scriptures say, “You are further admonished to covenant with me anew

that you may again be clean men and women, and find peace” (D. and C. 152:4c).

## **The Ethics of Preparation**

The divine call and ordination of ministers is not an award for achievement. Ministers are called by God and accepted by the church because there is a divine work for them to do. It is important that all who accept such a call make the very best preparation to serve God and humankind effectively. Ordained persons will maintain a desire to honor their priesthood through study. Basic study includes the three standard books of the church, but this is only the beginning. Joseph Smith Jr. was told to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D. and C. 87:5b). In our time it is probably not possible to read all of the good books available. As a result the church has tried to give some help in directing studies through Temple School and the Community of Christ Seminary.

Temple School provides education and training programs for priesthood members who want to develop the basic skills of ministry. Courses are available through individual home study or in field schools. These courses are offered periodically in many locations throughout the church. In this way Temple School attempts to introduce ministers to the broad variety of study materials available and to assist each person in developing an effective program.

The Community of Christ Seminary provides graduate courses for both full-time World Church ministers and self-sustaining ministers. A minister who meets entrance requirements may study toward a degree or alternatively study individual courses as a non-degree student. The seminary also offers non-degree programs.

Herald House lists books for study and worship that should be in every minister’s library. The church magazines provide information about the church. Especially important is the *Herald*, which is the church’s basic communication piece with every home.

## **Church Attendance**

Priesthood leadership requires regular attendance at church services. One's own faith and spiritual vitality are kept alive and strengthened through worship with the congregation and sharing with them the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Regular attendance helps provide the spiritual resources from which the priesthood member ministers to the people. By worshiping with the people one shares with them the recognition of their common needs. In this, as in other things, a minister leads the people in their response to the love of God and becomes their mediator, example, and companion.

It was in the recognition of both the minister's need and mission to others that the writer of the Hebrew letter wrote,

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as those of the people.

—Hebrews 5:1–3

## **The Ethics of Financial Responsibility**

Every minister is called to express a disciple's generosity through regular contribution of tithes. It is appropriate to contribute mission tithes in support of the World Church and the local church, and community tithes in support of worthy charities. Through stewardship, priesthood members demonstrate their response to the purposes of God, their accountability in temporal things, their integrity, and their responsibility toward funding the budget that supports the ministries of the church. Because priesthood members are called to teach the principles of the church, it is ethical and fitting that they observe and be held accountable for those principles in their own lives.

In all financial affairs the ministers of Christ express the most scrupulous honesty and integrity. This involves their personal, family, and business financial dealings. Prompt payment of financial obligations is expected of everyone. Unreasonable debt is to be avoided. Management of financial af-

fairs is based on the principles of productivity, repression of unnecessary wants, prompt payment of obligations when due, accountability, and church support through tithes, offerings, and consecrations.

On October 15, 1964, the Standing High Council approved a resolution that has served as a guide for those in the priesthood as they are involved in the promotion of private business interests. This is a highly important ethical concern to both the church and the integrity of the ministers involved. The full text is available on request from the First Presidency's office. The resolution reads in part as follows:

*Resolved*, That it is the opinion of this council that under no circumstances should the name of the church or the names of its officers, its seals, its institutions, pictures of its buildings or personnel, or other aspects of the church life be used to indicate or to imply in any way that any business is Zionite in character or endorsed by the church unless it is officially authorized; and be it also

*Resolved*, That it is the opinion of this council that no member of the priesthood should use the fact of his priesthood as a means of encouraging anyone to participate in any way in any business ventures; and be it further

*Resolved*, That in the opinion of this council, and in harmony with the Conference resolution cited, members of the church should make all reasonable investigations of business enterprises before patronizing or engaging in them, and should not become involved in such enterprises on the basis of the ministerial standing of those who administer or in any way promote the business concerned.

## **Chapter 12**

# **Administrative, Legislative, and Judicial Functions**

### **The Administrative Role of Priesthood**

Presidency is inherent in the Melchisedec priesthood (see Doctrine and Covenants 104:3–7). This becomes operative through the consent of the governed. The principle of common consent implies the consent to be governed through common understanding of the divine will.

There are levels of official prerogative and responsibility involving priesthood. At the same time, protection against the abuse of administrative authority is provided in the law.<sup>1</sup> In any ordered government it is important that administrative rights and duties be assigned, accepted, and recognized. In the church the right of calling priesthood involves God who makes the divine will known to those responsible for receiving the call and to the people who approve it. The call sometimes involves assignment (for example, Presidency, Twelve, Seventy, etc.).

There are other calls that are general, with specific assignments being made by the body from among those called to a certain group. For example, congregational pastors are elected by the people from among the priesthood and should be selected from among the elders if there are elders available who can serve.

### **The Standing Ministry**

Early Christian history indicates that the itinerant missionaries who established groups of believers in various places

left the work in the care of local ministers and pushed into new fields. They revisited these fields from time to time and sent instructions in writing to those who were called to continue the church's ministries in the areas where congregations developed.

The term **standing ministry** is peculiar to the Restoration movement and has come to be used to indicate those priesthood members functioning locally in their various offices. The Doctrine and Covenants states,

...in the standing ministry, the Presidency, second, the high priests; third, the elders, then priests, teachers, and deacons in their order.—Section 122:9c

The high priests and elders holding the same priesthood are the standing ministers of the church, having the watchcare of the membership and nurturing and sustaining them, under the direction and instruction of the Presidency and the Twelve.—Section 120:3c

The basic work of the church is done by the standing ministry. Most of these ministers sustain themselves by gainful employment and pay their own expenses in ministering to the church and its people. An example of this can be found in the Book of Mormon where Alma “commanded them that the priests whom he had ordained should labor with their own hands for their support” (Mosiah 9:57). Without these consecrated, self-sustaining workers the tasks of the church could not be carried on effectively. The standing ministry is indispensable.

## **Priesthood Serving the Church Full Time**

Not all church work can be performed by self-sustaining ministers. For some positions the work is so time-consuming that those doing it have no time left over for other employment. The **general officers** of the church have more than they can do in church work alone. The **traveling and supervising ministers** also must give full time to their tasks. These are sustained financially by the church. They serve harmoniously

together with the self-sustaining ministers. Both full-time ministers and self-sustaining ministers are of equal importance to the work of the church and to building the kingdom of God.

Priesthood members who are approved by the World Church Human Resources Committee to devote full time to ministerial activities are called **field appointees**. The specific nature of the work they do is defined by their assignments. They are subject to transfer of assignment by the World Church through procedures established by the First Presidency.

The World Church also employs **field specialists**, who are hired and supervised in field jurisdictions, and **executive ministers**. The work of an executive minister is usually much more focused than the work of a field appointee or field specialist, and of necessity the tenure of employment is related to the church's need for this specific ministry.

## **Common Consent and Legislative Conferences**

The principle of common consent is not satisfied by the passive acceptance by church members of leadership initiatives. The principle of two-way communication must prevail. Information and explanation need to be shared so there can be an interchange of thought. That is one of the purposes of discussion from the floor at a conference. But a conference is not the only place where this should be done. As a part of the home ministry program, the visiting minister goes to learn as well as to teach.

Because of the great needs in the world, there is an urgency about the ministries of the church, yet decision making should not be rushed and must be carefully done. Time must be given for the maturing of opinions lest snap judgment lead to action that may embarrass or destroy. At the same time, by planning ahead, undue delays can be avoided, and the ministries of the church may move forward at a steady pace.

The Bylaws of the Community of Christ point out the following regarding decision making in the church:

A basic principle of decision making in the Community of Christ is common consent. Common consent respects the

rights of the people to assent to the general conduct of business within the church and to sustain those called of God to provide leadership. Common consent is exercised when members assemble in conferences in congregations, mission centers, and at the World Conference. Leadership is exercised through the responsibility of presiding officers and members to make proposals to the various conferences to which they are responsible and through recognizing that these conferences have the responsibility to review such proposals, to share points of view, and to vote as they feel led by the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Legislative rights at any level pertain to the work of that level. A legislative conference may make recommendations to a conference at the next higher level.

Each conference has authority to legislate for those it represents, insofar as it does not usurp rights lawfully centered elsewhere. Accordingly, no congregational conference can legislate for its mission center, such as requiring certain acts on the part of mission center leaders, and no congregational or mission center conference can enact binding legislation on matters of World Church importance.<sup>3</sup>

Conferences of mission centers or congregations are regular gatherings authorized by a congregation, a mission center, or by the presiding officer of these jurisdictions. The member of the Council of Twelve who has administrative supervision may also call a conference if the need arises. These conferences have to do with the common interests of the church members within the specified areas. Mission centers have the option of providing for delegate conferences. In such cases the mission center conference is authorized to determine the basis for representation.<sup>4</sup>

Special conferences may be called by the First Presidency for the World Conference; by the mission center president for mission center conferences; and by the pastor for congregational conferences. In emergencies special conferences may also be called by the supervising administrative officer having jurisdiction. The call for special conferences shall specify the purpose of the conference

and only business mentioned in the call of the conference may be transacted.<sup>5</sup>

## **World Conference**

The World Conference is the highest legislative body in the church and should be organized with primary reference to its legislative functions. The World Conference is constituted according to the provisions of the rules of representation and is empowered to act for the entire church.<sup>6</sup>

## **Presiding Officers**

The First Presidency presides over World Conferences.<sup>7</sup> By custom this is done after passage of a motion that “the First Presidency preside over this conference and be authorized to complete its organization.” In case of the absence or disqualification of the First Presidency, the Council of Twelve shall so function.

In mission centers “the mission center president presides over the mission center conference. At his or her request or absence, another member of the mission center staff may be chosen to preside. Members of the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, or their authorized representatives may be asked to preside as a courtesy or in view of special circumstances.”<sup>8</sup> It is appropriate for the presiding officer to yield the chair to another when the business before the conference deals with matters in which the presiding officer is a party at interest.

In congregations

the pastor presides over congregational conferences. At the request of the pastor, or in the pastor’s absence, the counselors may preside. Members of the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, or mission center staff may be asked to preside as a courtesy or in view of special circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

It is the responsibility of the presiding officer to bring to the attention of the body such matters as may require consideration or action; to enforce observance of the rules

of order with decorum and propriety; to secure, as far as possible, a due respect and regard for the laws governing the church as contained in the scriptures, mission center, and World Conference enactments, as well as administrative procedures approved by the First Presidency.<sup>10</sup>

## **Participation in Conferences**

In congregational and mission center conferences all members in good standing may participate, with the exception of those mission centers in which the mission center conference is organized on a delegate basis. In that case, delegates participate in the mission center conference, and the mission center conference is authorized to determine the basis of representation.

World Conferences are organized as delegate conferences, with mission centers authorized to elect delegates to the World Conference.

Delegates are members of the World Conference to which they are elected and are entitled to voice and vote at its meetings.

The Credentials Committee shall determine enrollment of each jurisdiction as of one year prior to the convening of the World Conference and shall use that enrollment as a basis for allocating delegates from each jurisdiction. At least ten months before the convening of the World Conference, the Credentials Committee shall inform the president of each mission center of the number of delegates to which that mission center is entitled.

The only qualification for eligibility as a delegate to the World Conference shall be membership in good standing in the church.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Conferring Process**

Conferences are held for the purpose of conferring and transacting the business of the church. Each person participating in a conference should try to implement principles of Christian conduct and the willingness to yield to the decision of the majority even though he or she may have personal preferences that the conference does not accept.

The business of a conference should be conducted in the spirit of worship. It is hoped that the Holy Spirit's presence will bring light and the conviction of God's participation in the decisions made in a conference.

Often the decision made is less important to the work of the church than what happens to the development of the people in making the decision. Few decisions are good if the people become estranged from one another in the process. As priesthood members we are called to bring a ministry that unites and encourages the people. We should avoid becoming leaders of factions that divide. A poor decision that leaves the people united and anxious to work in the church for Christ is better than a right decision that creates conflict and division in the body.

## **Initiating Legislation**

In any mission center or congregational conference legislation may be initiated by members of that assembly. Legislation may also be initiated by reference from a lesser legislative organization or from administrative officers having jurisdiction. Each conference may enact rules governing the initiation of legislation to that conference.

Enactments of legislation on the part of any assembly must not be counter to what has been enacted by an assembly of higher level having jurisdiction. This goes back to the general principle that the actions of a legislative body must pertain to the work in the jurisdiction for which it functions.

The introduction of legislation to World Conference is governed by the rules adopted by the World Conference.

## **Judicial Procedures**

When conflicts between members or on issues of church polity arise, every attempt should be made to resolve them through the ministry of reconciliation. When these attempts have not been successful, in extreme cases, church members "may have access to church courts for protection or redress." Bishop's courts, or where these are not feasible, elders' courts, are standing courts and have original jurisdiction. The Standing High Council exists at the World Church level. It has origi-

nal jurisdiction in some matters and may hear appeals from bishop's courts. However, the First Presidency has the authority to determine whether any case is subject to a court hearing or a rehearing on appeal.<sup>12</sup>

Judicial procedure is initiated when the law of the church requires. It is called upon when decisions must be made concerning a member's status and rights. Though such decisions sometimes result in excommunication or expulsion, the primary purpose is to bring about repentance, forgiveness, and restitution.

In fairness to everyone, ministers who are called upon to act in judicial capacity must not be personally involved in the case. They are there to minister and must cultivate Christian attitudes.

## **Court Actions**

Charges brought before church courts must be specific in nature and show that ministerial labor has been attempted. Ministerial labor should exhaust all possibilities of redemptive ministry before a decision is made to submit the matter to a court.

When the offense is such that the court's decision is expulsion, the statement of the decision must not involve discussion of the merits of the case. Decisions requiring expulsion are presented to the appropriate business meeting for acknowledgment, "and the church shall lift up their hands" (see D. and C. 42:22).

Appeals must be within the time prescribed, except in those cases in which the appellate court grants additional time.

## Notes

1. WCR Nos. 849, 861.
2. Bylaws of the Community of Christ, Article II, Section 4, as found in *World Conference Resolutions*, 2002 Edition (Independence, Missouri: Herald House).
3. Article II, Section 6a.
4. Article IV, Section 3.
5. Article IV, Section 4.
6. Article IV, Section 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Article VI, Section 5.
9. Article V, Section 6.
10. Article V, Section 7.
11. Article IV, Section 2b–e.
12. Article III, Section 7.



## **Chapter 13**

# **Priesthood Calls**

### **Principles and Procedures in Considering Priesthood Calls**

Jesus personally chose his apostles from among his disciples, and he did so after spending all night in prayer (see Luke 6:12–13). He then charged them with particular duties on behalf of the people. The spirit of their ministry was service. They were warned not to think of their ministry as a means of personal aggrandizement.

Jesus showed his love and sense of responsibility for the people when he quoted from Isaiah to explain his own ministry (see Luke 4:18–19). The needs of the people were recited as the justification for his divine anointment by the Holy Spirit. Not only are priesthood members called to minister to the people in need, the people also share in calling and authorizing those who will serve. The church formally recognizes this principle in its procedure for calling and ordaining those in the priesthood.

The church provides procedures in considering calls to the priesthood in organized jurisdictions. This includes the discernment that God is calling, through the spirit of wisdom and revelation in those who act officially for the church, and the authorization for ordination by a vote of the members in a conference of the appropriate church jurisdiction (see Doctrine and Covenants 8:2, 17:16, 120:9, 124:3, and 125:14). Thus both God and the church share in the calling, ordination, and authorization of a priesthood member.

The Bylaws of the Community of Christ state the following relative to priesthood calling:

The basic principles pertaining to priesthood calls are that all calls shall be initiated by appropriate administrative officers, shall receive necessary administrative approvals, shall be presented to the candidate for acceptance, and shall be approved by an appropriate conference of members. Specific procedures are established by the First Presidency.<sup>1</sup>

The calling and ordination of a priesthood member is a formal procedure of the church. In actual practice the pastor or other administrative officer always carries a concern for those persons who are called. When the administrative officer is prayerfully seeking divine guidance it is expected that the Holy Spirit will indicate those whom God is calling into various priesthood offices. After presenting the call to those other administrative officers and councils concerned, and receiving their approval, the initiating officer then informs the one called. The presiding officer should discuss the nature of the call with the candidate for ordination. If the candidate for ordination does not accept the call within one year, the call is treated as if it had been declined. A new call can be initiated at a later date.

When the person being called is willing to serve, the whole matter is presented to a legislative conference or business meeting for the approval of the people. By such approval the members indicate their belief that the candidate is called and that they are willing to receive and support that person as a minister. After the legislative conference approves the call, the administrative officer provides for the ordination.

The methods the church has instituted for carrying out its corporate functions do not prevent God from working in and through anyone. God honors the church in decisions regarding those from whom the church will receive ministry as well as the willingness of the person who is called to give ministry. The church authorizes ordination and grants the authority for legal acts, but it is the Spirit of God that gives the priesthood member the power of redemptive ministry.

Calls to the priesthood come through those who are ordained to priesthood office and in administrative authority (see D. and C. 125:14). In some instances calls to specific orders

of the priesthood originate with particular quorums. Bishops are called through the First Presidency; evangelists are called through the apostolic council; seventies are called through the Council of Presidents of Seventy.

## **Aaronic Priesthood and Elders**

Calls to the Aaronic priesthood and to the office of elder are usually initiated by the congregational pastor, but may be initiated by the mission center president or the field apostle if the circumstances warrant. This will occur when a call is initiated for a member of the pastor's immediate family. The mission center president gives final administrative approval to all recommendations for ordination to the Aaronic priesthood and to the office of elder. This is done after clearance has been made with the First Presidency and before the contact with the candidate or presentation to the appropriate conferences.<sup>2</sup> Calls to the Aaronic priesthood and to the office of elder are presented to a congregational conference for legislative approval.

## **High Priest**

Recommendations for ordinations to the high priesthood may be made by members of the First Presidency or the Council of Twelve, mission center presidents who are high priests, or other high priests having administrative jurisdiction. Inasmuch as high priests are especially designated as standing ministers to the church under the direct oversight of the First Presidency (see Doctrine and Covenants 122:8, 9), all such nominations should be presented to the appropriate field apostle for approval and transmission to the director of Field Ministries and the First Presidency for approval and then for consideration by the Council of Twelve. If council approval is given, the call may be presented to the candidate, and then upon acceptance, legislative approval should be secured from the mission center conference or the World Conference.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals serving in certain councils, quorums, and orders must be high priests. The initiation of calls to those responsibilities occurs as follows:

1. Calls to the First Presidency, the Twelve, the Presiding Bishopric, and presiding evangelist are initiated by the president of the church through the spirit of inspiration and are presented for approval to the World Conference.

2. Calls to the office of bishop are initiated by the First Presidency following consultation with the respective field apostle and the Presiding Bishopric. The calls are then submitted to the World Church Leadership Council, and are presented to the World Conference or an appropriate mission center conference for legislative approval.<sup>4</sup>

3. Calls to the office of evangelist are initiated by members of the Council of Twelve Apostles following consultation with the presiding evangelist. Calls to the office of evangelist, after having been approved by the First Presidency and the Council of Twelve, shall be submitted to the World Conference or an appropriate mission center conference for legislative approval.<sup>5</sup>

4. Elders may be called concurrently to the high priesthood and the offices noted in this section.

## **Seventy**

Seventies are selected from among the elders. Calls to the office of seventy are initiated by the Council of Presidents of Seventy after consultation with the respective member of the Council of Twelve, shall receive the approval of the First Presidency and the World Church Leadership Council, and shall be approved by the World Conference or an appropriate mission center conference.<sup>6</sup>

## **Approaching the Candidate**

All official consultation, administrative approval, and when necessary council approval of priesthood calls should be completed before the candidate is notified. This should be done by the calling officer in person or, when this is not practicable, by telephone. Experience indicates that the utmost tact, patience, and sympathetic understanding are required in approaching the prospective minister with regard to ordination. The final choice in every case must rest with the candidate.

The candidate must not be unduly urged and certainly must not be coerced. When contacting the candidate, the calling officer should bear testimony to the divinity of the call and provide information related to duties of the office and the expectations for preordination instruction.

At a congregational conference the officer who initiated the call shares his or her testimony with the congregation. Also the one called should be given opportunity to express his or her feelings. Others may be allowed to speak regarding the ordinations if they so desire before the vote of the body is taken. On favorable action of the congregation, the pastor may arrange for a service of ordination after the candidate has completed pre-ordination preparation. Such arrangements should be made in consultation with the mission center president, the candidate, and any others legitimately concerned.

## **Officiating Ministers**

High priests may ordain other high priests, elders, priests, teachers, or deacons. Evangelists should be ordained by a member of the Council of Twelve if possible or, if not, by high priests appointed by the member of the Twelve concerned. Bishops should be ordained by a member of the First Presidency if possible or, if not, by high priests appointed by the First Presidency.

Seventies should be ordained by the field apostle concerned or by a member of the Council of Presidents of Seventy. If this is not possible the field apostle may authorize the ordination to be done by any seventy or high priest.

Elders should be ordained by other elders or high priests. Priests, teachers, and deacons may be ordained by priests, elders, or high priests. Teachers and deacons are not authorized to ordain.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. Bylaws of the Community of Christ, Article III, Section 3, as found in *World Conference Resolutions*, 2002 Edition (Independence, Missouri: Herald House).
2. WCR 988.
3. WCR 1051.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. WCR 966.
7. WCR 386; 638; 1051; see also Doctrine and Covenants 17:8.

## **Chapter 14**

# **The Pastor's Role in Priesthood Calls**

Perhaps one of the most significant yet most demanding tasks of a pastor is the responsibility of calling individuals to the priesthood. To be able to stand before the individual called and the congregation that ultimately must support that call and say, "I have evidence that this call is of God, is timely, and is in fulfillment of need" is indeed an awesome responsibility. However, the pastor is not alone in carrying this weighty burden but may expect corroborating witness of the authenticity of the call by his or her counselors, others in the congregation, and/or the mission center president or staff member. The support and guidance of the mission center president should be sought and welcomed. Experience is a great teacher, yet every call has elements of the new and unfathomed, of uncertainty and certitude.

### **Where to Begin**

Many questions arise in the mind of the conscientious pastor when considering a call to priesthood. What is the purpose of priesthood? As calling officer, what is required of me? What are the needs of the congregation? What constitutes "evidence" in the discerning of a call? How does the Holy Spirit work in supportive confirmation or revelatory experience? What is expected of the person called? What questions should I ask and what procedure should I follow in calling persons to the priesthood? What is the significance of the event of ordination? What is the pastor's role following ordination? Undoubtedly, no final answers can be given to these questions but suggestions can be offered to assist presiding officers in decisions of ultimate significance.

## **The Purpose of Priesthood**

Simply stated, priesthood is designed to facilitate the witnessing, revealing, redeeming ministry of the gospel. According to Luke's account, Jesus spent all night in prayer before choosing his apostles. They had gifts and potential in their lives to match the needs for ministry among the people to whom they were sent. As the early Christian church grew, so did the importance of priesthood ministry. What we know of the congregational structure of those early days is limited, but there appears to have been an emphasis on the ministry of each member. The call to all was to be apostolic: go forth in power and proclaim the gospel. All were called to be witnesses of God's presence in their lives. The gifts of the Spirit were bestowed on those whose commitment and receptiveness to the Divine qualified them to be representatives of the Christian message. The call of all believers to ministry was a firmly held conviction of these early believers. Through the centuries, this recognition may have diminished in practice, but in importance the concept is more relevant than ever.

Because the mission was to all, early Christian congregations appear to have been rather unstructured. As congregations grew, however, leadership and specialized ministry became essential. The more complex a group became, the more its productivity depended on structural efficiency. As those early congregations struggled with the concept of priesthood, each met the need in its own way.

To say that the structural concept of priesthood was a gradual development in the Christian church is not to understate its importance. Divine involvement and commission are present everywhere. We do not call ourselves as ministers. Though human agency is involved, the call is divine. So it has been from the beginning.

## **God Still Calls Disciples**

The church today proclaims that God is still calling disciples to specific ministerial responsibilities in light of their giftedness and in response to the needs of the church and the larger community. Former member of the First Presidency F.

Henry Edwards wrote, “The church’s function in relation to ministry is to recognize those to whom God has given the gifts of ministry and clear the way for the expression of their gifts.”

Many early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants deal with priesthood and the specific responsibilities of various offices. Essentially, the priesthood of the Community of Christ consists of two divisions: Melchisedec and Aaronic. Each office within these divisions has its own responsibilities that together facilitate the redeeming witness of the gospel.

The call to priesthood comes through the administrative officers of the church—in the case of the congregation, the pastor. Calls to the offices of the Aaronic priesthood and elder may be initiated by the congregational pastor, while other ministers are called by the appropriate officers at other jurisdictional levels. Men and women are called to the priesthood and to specific offices within the priesthood by church officers responding to the spirit of inspiration, wisdom, and discernment. Through ordination the authority of the church is bestowed on the priesthood designate, though final authority and successful ministry reside in the life of each person called.

As Apostle John Rushton once observed, “My authority is written into the biography of my life.” If a member of the priesthood fails to carry that authority, opportunities for ministry are lost. If any of us as priesthood live contrary to the vows we have taken, inevitable deterioration among the membership will occur. The seriousness of this issue was addressed in recent counsel to the church:

Hear, O my people, regarding my holy priesthood. The power of this priesthood was placed in your midst from the earliest days of the rise of this work for the blessing and salvation of humanity. There have been priesthood members over the years, however, who have...used it for personal aggrandizement. Others, through disinterest or lack of diligence, have failed to magnify their calling or have become inactive. When this has happened, the church has experienced a loss of spiritual power, and the entire priesthood structure has been diminished.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:7

A genuine recognition of the purpose of priesthood and the dedicated function of all to whom the call of office has come is essential to the forward movement of the church, its mission to spread the good news of the gospel, and its call to witness in love and humility.

## **The Pastor's Responsibilities**

A pastor, a shepherd, should not only preach the word but live it. The demand placed on the pastor in this regard is no different from that placed on other disciples of Christ, but anyone called to a position of leadership has increased influence. Furthermore, by embodying what is spoken, the ministry of the pastor is immediately magnified. Perfection is not a requirement, but the continual striving for perfection is. The Christian gospel is rich in forgiveness to the truly repentant, and the strength to begin again is part of the endowment of the Spirit. The pastor participates in this great gift, as do all disciples.

If pastors truly wish to know the Divine in greater measure, they must strive to cleanse their lives: "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52:11 IV). The principle is divinely instituted and finds memorable expression in the Doctrine and Covenants: "Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God" (D. and C. 85:18b).

The pastor/shepherd must know the flock. It is out of a knowledge of the needs of the congregation and the potential ministry of individual members that the pastor can effectively initiate calls to the priesthood. It is important in the internal struggles that so often take place in congregations that the pastor remain as objective as possible. Division over issues should never affect the love of persons or the recognition of their worth. A vindictive or jaundiced view has no place in a pastor's life. Though the divine impulse is essential in the calling of persons to the priesthood, human judgment always plays a part. This, as F. Henry Edwards once said, "arises out of the divine intention to share responsibility with us."

## Dual Responsibilities

A pastor is called to minister and administer. Because of their natures, these two responsibilities do not necessarily relate well together. Administrative detail, the practical acumen necessary, the struggles over issues, organizational management, sheer busyness, and great activity—all can work counter to the stillness necessary for spiritual transparency and preparation for ministry. To so manage time and mental energy that the beauty of holiness and its consequent ministry can be an integral part of life is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing pastors.

The responsibility of a pastor is indeed challenging, but the task is not one that is unaided. As we seek, so shall we find. A power will work through us that is not from us. Life and ministry become lifted to a plane that reflects the Divine.

## The Needs of the Congregation

A crucial question in congregational life, as in professional life, is this: What kind of team with what qualifications will best accomplish our purposes? Two related questions follow: What kind of person, what kind of service are we in need of at the present time? Do we have anyone whose gifts and talents can fill that need? Such assessment related to priesthood may seem all too human and fallible. But such are the purposes of God, as we learned in Oliverly Cowdery's experience in 1829:

Behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right, I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right; but if it be not right, you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought, that shall cause you to forget the thing that is wrong.—D. and C. 9:3b–d

There is indeed a horizontal dimension to the revelatory experience. The call is to the partnership of the Divine and human. We must be involved, as well as God. Without God, as Apostle Arthur Oakman once pointed out, “we cannot; without us, [God] will not.”

As culture changes, so the needs of the church change. Though universal principles underlie the gospel, what is appropriate and efficacious in one time and place may not be so in another. No one illustrates this better than Paul.

On the one hand, Paul had a great spiritual vision: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). But Paul was also an administrator. He knew when to exercise control of a runaway congregation and when to push for principles that many were reluctant to accept. He exercised the latter option over the issue of circumcision of non-Jews. He took on the authority figures of the Christian church—people like Peter and the rest who had known Christ in the flesh, which Paul had not—and insisted that Jewish law, such as circumcision, should not apply to the Gentiles. Paul considered the issue important enough that he risked his ability to minister. He could have been cut off by the church and had no official recognition as a representative of Christianity. As it was, he endured the constant undermining of his position by “truth-tellers” who followed him in an attempt to undo his work. Paul, nevertheless, stayed with a principle in which he believed.

Decisions such as Paul made are pastoral in nature. Actions may have to be taken that, in the short run, appear to be inhibiting or even a serious break with tradition but that in the long run make possible a greater light and true Christian liberty.

## **An Integral Part of the Pastoral Role**

Calls to the priesthood are an integral part of a pastor’s understanding of the needs of his or her congregation. No one method of calling can be specified because no one has the right to dictate to another how wisdom must function or how inspiration is to be received. In some cases a pastor will consider a person’s leadership potential and spiritual awareness in light of the perception of current needs. Insights about the person’s candidacy for priesthood would then be tested and validated through prayer and possibly through discussion with the pastor’s counselors.

A growing conviction of the validity of the call may come through continuing observation of the candidate, prayer, and reflection on behalf of the candidate and the needs of the church. In other cases a dramatic spiritual experience may be the event that triggers consideration of the call. This experience may draw attention in a powerful way to the candidate's capacity to minister to the needs of the people. In no case, however, should a call be consummated without the affirming Spirit of divine direction. The combination of the best of the human mind illuminated by the Holy Spirit makes the eventual invitation to ministry one of great meaning, both to the person called and to the forward movement of the congregation.

## **Discerning a Call**

God's Spirit may speak to us in many ways. The touch of the Divine may be as quiet and normal as breathing, ever-present, constantly sustaining life, assuring us that "the Eternal God is our home and underneath are the everlasting arms"; or it may come as the Hound of Heaven that follows us down the labyrinthine ways even when we are trying to escape. The experience may range from a sudden apprehension of wonder in the midst of the glory of creation to the certitude of divine self-disclosure; from a sensing of the mysterious to the affirmation of Apostle Paul, "I know in whom I have believed"; from a vague longing to a commitment "costing not less than everything."

In matters that relate to church leadership, we sometimes expect God to "take over" and absolve us from the necessity of exercising our faith and taking the risks associated with actions of faith. God does indeed work in powerful and unusual ways but at moments of God's own choosing and according to divine wisdom. Those moments of powerful direction are the exception and not the usual experience for reasons relating to our growth in faith and judgment. The personal experience of many pastors indicates that the clearest light or strongest spiritual assurance of a call may come when, for some reason, the call is resisted in the mind of the leader who has responsibility for the call. God works with us in a way that does not violate our agency or right of choice in all human-Divine interaction.

The most basic and substantial evidence of a person's call is in the nature of the person. What are her or his priorities, desires, and interests in life? The scripture reveals, "If ye have desires to serve God, ye are called to the work" (D. and C. 4:1c). There may be supportive evidence of a calling by their expression of "desires to serve" through active participation in the work. It is helpful to note some signal of the Holy Spirit directing our attention to a given person through a strong impression or, at other times, with a quiet, persistent thought of the possibility of the ordination but that does not represent the only evidence of a person's call. The Holy Spirit may find it necessary to direct our attention to a person when the call should already have been obvious to us and we were not responding.

## **The Appropriate Office**

The office to which a person should be called at a given time and place is related to the gifts, interests, and abilities of the person, and also to the need for particular kinds of ministry existing in that situation. There are some people who could function in more than one office very adequately. With regard to the designation of an office of priesthood, the candidate's natural gifts, talents, potential for growth, and basic personality structure should be taken into account and used to match the person to an appropriate office. Of course, the needs of the congregation will also impact the designation of office.

In the past there has been a tendency toward a vertical rather than a horizontal view of the various offices. Consequently, the Aaronic priesthood offices were sometimes seen as the training ground for the Melchisedec priesthood. Pastors should seek a realistic assessment of the person's gifts and the church's needs at the time of the first call. This will lead to more stability and greater longevity of service within the office of first call and a strengthening of the entire priesthood structure. This does not mean that calls from one office into another will not occur, but only that their incidence will be decreased with this more careful fitting to office at the time the first call is presented. If you do not receive clear spiritual evidence as to which office is indicated, "you must study it out in your mind"

and move in faith to decide according to the nature of the person and the needs of the congregation.

As you carefully and prayerfully make these evaluations, the Holy Spirit may be depended on to be with you. You may feel assurance to proceed with a call, or in some instances you may feel restraint for the present time. With others who are devoted and active, you will be expected to proceed if you feel no restraining influence; the assurance you would like to receive before acting will come to you in the process of the calling and ordination procedure. These assurances may come through the testimony of the Spirit given to others, by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the presentation to the people, at the time of ordination, or during the ordinand's service in ministry. The Holy Spirit moves by divine initiative. We do not decide just when and how God will bear witness of divine callings.

For fallible human beings, to speak for the Divine is indeed a humbling experience. To speak with certitude about divine or heavenly things has occasionally been a spiritual trap in Christian history with great potential for harm. Yet within our history as a movement, there has always been the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit to confirm, control, comfort, and guide to insightful truth.

## **Where to Look for Help**

When there are conflicting claims to authentic inspiration, especially regarding calls to priesthood, how may the pastor be helped? Imagination and feverish desire may lead some to believe an experience is divine that has only been created within themselves. Some may seek personal aggrandizement by declaring themselves special agents of the Divine. Certain forms of illness or even prescribed drugs may create hallucinatory images that have little foundation in fact. Emotion dissociated from clear thinking may cause some to revel in "great moments" that dissipate without consequence in thoughtful action. Some might be tempted to attribute divine origin to a certain position to vindicate a stance they have taken. Even persons of unquestioned integrity and sincere intent might bring differing interpretations to an experience of the Divine. In all these and other similar situations, the calling adminis-

trative officer is solely responsible to the institutional church for the initiation of calls. Whether it be the pastor, the mission center president, or other administrative officer, no other voice may claim comparable authority to initiate authentic calls for the institutional church.

However, we are not left with institutional support alone. The Lord has not left us comfortless. We need not be prey to distortions of divine self-disclosure. We have been promised the gift of discernment as one of the spiritual gifts. If we seek guidance in humility of spirit, both for ourselves and for the claims of others, we can discern between right and wrong. Discrimination and growth in spiritual competence guide us in what can be the greatest of all human experiences.

In the universe in which we live, individuality is of great importance. In the divine-human encounter individuality is enhanced, not diminished. For some it is stillness and subtlety that matter. For others, only the dramatic carries weight. Though a pastor's recognition of the needs and talents of a given congregation may come from the slow accumulation of fact and the operation of the administrative mind, the dimension of knowledge so acquired can be expanded by the Spirit of God. This is not as a substitute for reason or sensory data but as an illuminating power operating through them. Something that earlier had been intellectually apprehended takes fire and becomes an experience. The facts we confront and the knowledge we have may not be essentially different, but we refocus, we "attend" to what we formerly missed. When the Holy Spirit so touches us, it is not to destroy our human responsibility and understanding but to raise it to a more profound level of being.

## **Activity and Contemplation**

To those who seek, God communicates through action and contemplation. There are times to actively search and build. There are times in quiet contemplation to listen, "to be still and know that I am God." A mind too anxious or too busily occupied can often screen out the Spirit. For the searcher, belief in the possibility of "presence" is tremendously important. Without the belief that such a communion is possible between the hu-

man and the Divine, God's moment may pass unattended. Our own willingness to receive is as important as the willingness of God to give.

God will reveal calls to priesthood through administrative officers of the church in a way that honors divine concern for the growing faith of the administrative officer as well as the response of the person being called. God will not cause an administrative channel for a divine call to become a "hollow pipe" for the purpose of running priesthood calls through without some involvement of the calling officer. Instead, it is the calling officer's responsibility to "study it out" in his or her mind. There must be a willingness to exercise faith in the relationship to God and in the individuals being called. The growth of all individuals involved in the process of calling, ordaining, and responding to God's call is of concern to God.

In the revelatory experience of perceiving a priesthood call, such an illumination is a divine event interacting with the human. We recognize that it can easily be distorted by human beings and thereby falsified in its expression. The event of revelation can never be totally equated with the human experience of it. We perceive but a fraction of the whole and are inadequate to totally describe the Eternal. Humbly recognizing our proper relation to God and that "we see as through a glass darkly," we can still be representatives of the divine will and can affirm with assurance God's will for the people.

## **Qualifications and Expectations**

If the authority to minister centers at least partially in the personhood of the one called, quality of life is a major consideration. The person called must be someone of high ethical and moral standards, of significant personal stewardship, including financial support of the church's ministries, reasonable educational level, devotion to individual development and spiritual competence, dedication to the mission of the church, and, most of all, a participant in that abiding love that is first received and then lovingly given in ministry. The viability of the message is ultimately related to the person who utters it. Word and action cannot be separated.

Though no absolute educational standard should be set for the person called, the individual should have basic sensitivity, understanding, and a demonstrated willingness to learn. One evidence of willingness to learn is participation in Temple School classes that help prepare people for leadership and priesthood responsibilities. Dedication by itself is not enough. Every leader also wants to be competent. If formal education is lacking, the candidate for priesthood must show a strong interest in personal development. Motivation is the key that will lead to extraordinary effort from ordinary human beings. Maurice Draper, a former member of the First Presidency, wrote,

Endowed ministry involves skill. It is not sufficient that one be designated and receive the laying on of hands. Well-intentioned error is error nonetheless. Devotion to a calling means that that calling be justified in effective performance.\*

The invitation to priesthood often will be accompanied by confirmation to the one called. As the pastor receives evidence, so may the individual, although many may find their confirmation of the call through the rich experiences of ministry accompanied by divine empowerment. The call of God is intensely personal and gives the foundation from which ministry can proceed with assurance. To know, “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1), is to participate in the foundational love of the universe. To be known by name is to recognize individuality. In the body of Christ are many members with special gifts and functions. A calling makes us aware of these differences and, as in the parable of the talents, asks us to recognize our endowments, to make them grow and expand. As we do, the grace of God unfolds in our lives. The joy of ministry comes when we recognize our qualification is always from God and not from ourselves. As the apostle Paul wrote,

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.—II Corinthians 3:5–6

## **Servant Ministry**

Part of the humility of those called to ministry should be the recognition always that though a special need exists for their service, they are not thus superior to the rest of the congregation. “All are called according to the gifts of God unto them” (D. and C. 119:8b), and the responsibility of the member in fulfilling that call is just as important in the sight of God as is the call to priesthood.

Though hierarchy appears to exist in priesthood structure—and operationally cannot be avoided totally—a sense of anyone being better than someone else merely through call to office has no place in the Community of Christ. Any one of us may be an unprofitable servant, but whether the service we give is highly visible and publicly recognized or quiet and largely unnoticed, the important thing for us is the fulfillment of our vow to be the best that we can be. Having said that, we also know that when the word comes, “I have chosen you,” we have been given additional responsibility we cannot carry lightly. The joy of that responsibility comes when all are joined in the communion of saints, and the congregation is lifted to a higher level of service and actively pursues the invitation to go into all the world.

Finally, all of us called to priesthood or to discipleship in the Community of Christ need a love we cannot know and a light we cannot reveal unless we have first received it in association with the Christ. It is God who calls us and gives us power to become daughters and sons of the Divine. Our Lord will not require of us more than we can give. All God asks is a reasonable service. But as in the experience of the loaves and fishes, Jesus Christ takes our gifts, small though they may sometimes be, and enhances them to feed a multitude.

## **Questions to Ask**

When considering calling persons to priesthood responsibilities, a pastor should prayerfully consider many questions. Different questions, of course, may arise when giving thought to the initial call to minister and to the particular office. The following questions should serve as a general guide:

1. What leads you to a conviction that this person is being called to priesthood function in the Community of Christ?

2. What are the gifts and potential for ministry evident in this person's life for immediate and long-term ministry? How do they relate to a calling to a specific office?

3. Is there need in the congregation, other church settings, or the community for this person's ministry?

4. How will this ordination affect the balance of ministry (in proportion to all the various priesthood offices) in the congregation?

5. How does this person express an affirmative testimony of Christ and positive support of all levels of church life: congregation, mission center, World Church?

6. Is this person's life currently "in order" in regard to personal relationships, morality, response to the principles of personal stewardship, and family finances?

7. If the person has been divorced, has inquiry been made regarding the circumstances?

8. Does this candidate exhibit good stewardship of health and hold high standards of behavior, avoiding the abuse of chemical substances, alcohol, and tobacco? 

9. Does the candidate actively support the church to the best of his or her ability in terms of attendance, and World Church and local financial response?

10. Does the candidate evidence a positive attitude toward study, personal improvement, and spiritual growth?

11. If this person has been involved in any conduct that could reflect negatively on her or his ability to minister, have you counseled with your supervising officers to determine if this should be a factor in processing this recommendation?

12. Is the candidate's appearance, manner of dress, and general demeanor acceptable to the congregation?

13. Does the candidate enjoy adequate health to fulfill the demands of the office?

14. What is the reaction of your counselors to this call?

15. What will be the likely reaction of the people assembled in legislative conference to this call?

16. What will be the likely reaction of the spouse and other members of the candidate's family to this call?

## The Congregation's Needs

When considering the needs of the people, the pastor must not ignore the fact that divine calling is expressed finally through the specific ministries that are offered. As the apostle Paul pointed out, the body is made up of various members with gifts to serve the body in specific functions. If all the members of the body were eyes, the functions of hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching would be lost. Similarly there is need in the body of the church for all of the priesthood offices because of their functions.

The pastor will do well, therefore, to give thought to the numbers and qualifications of priesthood needed for the sake of the body while remaining sensitive to the divine will for guidance in selecting candidates for ordination. There are some general guidelines for assisting the pastor in this process. They include certain assumptions arising from experience in ministry in the church:

1. All priesthood are active, and they are performing their duties and respective tasks.
2. All individual priesthood members are competent to perform the ministry described for them.
3. Members and friends will solicit and receive ministry from the priesthood in accordance with these descriptions.
4. Priesthood efforts are complemented and supplemented by ministry appropriately provided by the unordained.
5. Each priesthood member will spend many hours per year in ministry beyond the usual church participation. Of these hours, a significant number should be spent in efforts directed toward ministerial education and growth, such as continuing education through Temple School or the Community of Christ Seminary.

Of course, the actual practice of individuals and congregations will vary greatly. That is why these are *guidelines* and not *requirements*. Some small congregations might have a greater need for family and individual ministry than larger ones, and hence need what might otherwise seem a disproportional number of Aaronic priesthood. Any pastor who considers processing a priesthood call just to “fill a slot” or “get the right number”

of any one priesthood office should probably reconsider his or her motives as well as other ways to meet the congregation's needs.

## **The Significance of Ordination**

Ordination is a sacrament. It is the confirmation of call and the invocation of the Divine. It is also a public occasion. It comprises a four-fold vow: the *commitment* of the candidate, the *recognition* of the Divine, the *affirmation* of receptiveness and supportive ministry by the congregation, and the formal *authorization* by the institutional church. There is reciprocal responsibility that comes from this authorizing sacrament: the individual minister is responsible to the church as an institution for his or her actions, and the church is responsible for the authoritative actions of the minister. The congregation can never simply be idle spectators at such an event. The doctrine of common consent is one of the undergirding principles of the Restoration.

We have the promise that the light of the Holy Spirit will work with us but not without the use of the best of human reason. Before the occasion of the laying on of hands, the congregation will have given its approval of the call. Not only should each voting member give that approval thoughtfully and prayerfully, but the experience should remind them of their apostolic function to go forth in power to proclaim the gospel. The culmination of that recognition comes in the sacrament of ordination itself. As the vow of the ordinand is received and blessed, so the vow of each member, in once more affirming personal responsibility and ministry, is received and blessed. We renew our vows when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but the vows we make as we participate in the other sacraments and ordinances of the church are equally important.

Throughout the New Testament virtually every reference to the work of the Holy Spirit is related to the group: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). As we lend our minds, talents, and skills to one another, the Holy Spirit recognizes our efforts and enhances our gifts.

## **A Covenant Calling**

Ordination is divine recognition, not just of the one called but of the group, who has given supportive assistance and to whom the word comes, saying in essence, “I have not forgotten you. I have chosen servants to minister in your midst.” Not only does the ordinand recognize a specific vocation to minister, but the congregation affirms its support. In such sharing with one another and with the Holy Spirit, we each can leave stronger than we were before and with the assurance that we do not walk alone. We are engaged in mutual support for a common purpose.

In the ordination itself, where receptiveness and preparation are present in the candidate, there comes the enabling power of the Divine. What happens is the affirmation of a covenant relationship. The vow given at that moment is mutual—between the individual and the Divine and between the individual and the institution. Such an experience and such a vow are possible for all, but call to office and ordination is a selective process for selective work, one covenanted to and supported by both the individual and the Divine. As the endowment of the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the candidate in the ordination event, so the outstretched hand of the Divine will be ever there.

## **The Pastor’s Role after Ordination**

To a large extent the pastor is responsible for directing priesthood members and helping them function in their offices and callings. Particularly for those newly ordained, instruction, guidance, and positive reinforcement are very important. The communication of appreciation for work well done may often give enough confidence to the newly ordained to inspire increased effort and stronger ministry.

An important aspect of that appreciation is instilling confidence in the ordained regarding the worthwhileness of the task. Such worthwhileness can be communicated only when the pastor is a genuine leader. If the congregation is on the move, then all desire to be part of an important endeavor. The tragedy of many congregations is internal quarreling over issues that divide member from member and friend from friend. Though the

issues often are centered around interpretation of the gospel, its true significance is forgotten. Loving concern for one another and our Christian purpose for being become lost.

We are certainly not all required to think or believe alike, but we are called to have our lives centered in Christ and to be his witnesses in the world. Though all share in the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the group, the pastor is in the best position to radiate a spirit of reconciliation and love. If the priesthood become quarrelsome or the membership begin to stray, the pastor must speak the redeeming word. This is indeed an awesome responsibility but perhaps more necessary in this particular time than ever before.

To assist ordained ministers in performing at their maximum level, formal and informal evaluations have become part of their ministry. Such evaluations should always begin with self-assessment on the part of the priesthood member. Along with that assessment should be a growth plan in which the individual annually considers and writes down plans for personal development and ministry. Such creative exploration of ministerial possibility may be viewed in the light of a position description. Seeking to “magnify our calling” requires a constant concern for the possibilities within the call and a willingness to involve ourselves in the discipline that will release our true potential. Self-discipline, especially in the light of our calling to be disciples of Christ, is the essence of our calling to priesthood.

Personal assessment and growth plans tend to have more effect if someone else is evaluating our progress. That is the role of the pastoral leadership. Pastoral evaluation of progress is formalized so that no one feels himself or herself a victim of bias or discrimination. Though suggestions for procedure may come from the World Church, each congregation will need to adapt methods to meet its own needs. In any event, everyone should be clear about what is involved and inspired to participate actively and willingly in the process.

The future is indeed filled with opportunity and the call is to go forth for the blessing and salvation of humanity. Inspired counsel given to the church in 1984 offers admonition and promise:

Dear Saints, have courage for the task which is yours in bringing to pass the cause of Zion. Prepare yourselves through much study and earnest prayer. Then, as you go forth to witness of my love and my concern for all persons, you will know the joy which comes from devoting yourselves completely to the work of the kingdom. To this end will my Spirit be with you. Amen.—D. and C. 156:11

\*Maurice Draper, "Endowment for Redemptive Ministries" *Saints Herald* 121, no. 2 (February 1974): 14.



# **Part Two**



## **Chapter 15**

# **Worship in the Life of the Church**

### **The Experience of Worship**

Meaningful worship is central to the life and well-being of the Community of Christ. Although it is universal in practice, worship is conducted in many different styles, forms, and settings. It ranges from personal to corporate, and from spontaneous to structured. In our diverse and multicultural world, people of faith have widely varied opinions as to what should, and should not, be included in the worship life of the church. The task of worship leadership grows increasingly more difficult as ministers seek to be inclusive as well as considerate of the range of expectation among those sharing the experience.

The Community of Christ is a nonliturgical church and since its inception has followed a free-form worship tradition. Except for certain sacramental procedures, there are no mandated orders of worship or requirements as to the elements to be present in a worship service. Even so, there are common characteristics of worship as well as time-proven worship elements that should be considered by ordained ministers as they participate in guiding the church in effective worship. Moreover, the church provides excellent annual worship suggestions that help guide the planner and give the denomination both the freedom of creativity found in its heritage and at the same time a continuity that strengthens denominational identity.

### **Characteristics of Corporate Worship**

Five characteristics are commonly found in congregational worship experiences:

1. ***In worship, we encounter God.*** The experience of corporate worship is one of interaction between God, self, and others. We receive God's self-revelation through all of our human capacities and, in response, give to God all that we are. Worship is an occasion in which we interact with the Divine and each other and, in so doing, are transformed.

2. ***In worship, we celebrate and share the gospel.*** A central focus of worship is the recognition of the good news of God's reconciling and redeeming activity exhibited through Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. As such, worship assists us in comprehending God's saving grace. Worship is an expression of our faith and beliefs, and should reflect our best understanding of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church.

3. ***In worship, we find meaning in life's experiences.*** We live in God's world. The church exists as part of that world and is not called to separate itself from the realities of life. Worship should engage and speak to people in the circumstances of their lives. Worship calls us to discipleship within the midst of both the joys and sorrows of life, and it causes us to renew our desire to respond to God's call through compassionate acts of peace, justice, and reconciliation. In worship, we acknowledge the presence of God in the midst of human activity and choose to address the realities of life in the elements of worship.

4. ***In worship, we celebrate together in community.*** The church is the body of Christ; the Community of Christ is a church that seeks unity. Worship expresses this unity by calling the entire congregation together and seeking to use the best gifts of all in the worship experience. In worship we come together to be engaged and involved, with many offering their ministries and competencies for the enrichment of the group. While worship is a community experience, those entrusted with public ministry should seek training in the art and skill of public ministry. Inclusion is not an excuse for ill-prepared expressions of ministry.

5. ***In worship, we remember and rehearse the sacred story.*** As Christians, we have a rich heritage born in the Jewish tradition and lived out for more than 2,000 years by billions of people faithful to the risen Christ. As a denomination, we have

a fascinating history of faith, courage, and vision lived out by women and men with a vision of the establishment of God's beloved community throughout the earth. Effective worship reminds us that we are the people of God and a part of the great tradition of faith developed over centuries of corporate worship. Scriptures, hymns, and testimonies keep us linked to the past while at the same time calling us into the future.

## **The Elements of Worship**

The Community of Christ, as well as other denominations, has been well served for many years by recognizing four primary elements of corporate worship. These are sometime referred to as the model arising from the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–8) in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament).

1. ***Adoration and Praise.*** Worship begins when we acknowledge that we are in the presence of God. When we experience God, it is natural to express our thanks and adoration. When we sense the activity of God throughout the earth in providing to human beings an amazing range of divine gifts, we can do no less than express our profound gratitude and praise. Isaiah expressed it this way, “Holy, holy holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

2. ***Confession and Repentance.*** When Isaiah experienced the presence of God, he immediately sensed his own unworthiness and exclaimed, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” For Isaiah, unclean lips were the symbol of his human inadequacy. His confession acknowledged his sinfulness and dependence on God. The mood of confession is one of humility and of appreciation of a God who hears our cries and responds with grace.

Repentance involves contrition that leads to change. It is not the act of remorse that is at the heart of repentance, but rather the use of one's energies to bring about a change in attitude, behavior, or perception.

3. ***Proclamation and Affirmation.*** Words of confession are answered by God's forgiveness. Isaiah experienced this as

a live coal from the altar touching and purifying his lips: “Your guilt has departed, iniquity is taken away, and your sin is blotted out.”

Central to worship is the proclamation of the word of God. This proclamation focuses on the good news brought through Jesus Christ. It is the proclamation that those who are in bondage shall be freed; those who are in sorrow shall find joy; and those who seek meaning and purpose for life shall find it. Proclamation is at the heart of the church’s mission: “We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.”

God’s word is the word of hope for ongoing salvation. It is the declaration of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God among us and for us. The proclamation calls us to the promotion of community, so that all of God’s people may live in mutual regard for one another and with the resources of the earth being shared equitably by all. Proclamation comes in many forms in the church, but is effectively found in corporate worship through the preaching of scripture-based sermons.

4. ***Commitment and Dedication.*** The concluding element of this sequence is the human response that is evoked. Isaiah’s words are eloquent in their simplicity: “Here am I; send me.” It is at this point in worship that we offer our firm resolve through commitment and dedication. By publicly declaring our intent, we show that we take discipleship seriously and that worship is not an isolated act. We recognize that our calling takes us beyond the sanctuary and into all the places where God’s people dwell. Our act of dedication links us to the church and the world.

## **The Role of Priesthood in Worship**

Ordained ministers in the Community of Christ are often called on to plan, lead, and participate in corporate worship. Non-ordained individuals may provide leadership also, including worship planning, prayer, reading, music, drama, testimony, and preaching. Non-ordained people may also be “in charge” of a service, when the congregation’s presiding officer delegates the presiding function.

The only aspect of corporate worship that mandates exclusive priesthood involvement is the administration of the eight sacraments of the church. It is common practice that services involving the sacraments be presided over by ordained ministers.

Public ministry is a gift that combines a variety of skills, many of which can be learned. The public minister must combine sound theology, pastoral and spiritual sensitivity, and presentation skills in a way that informs, challenges, and inspires the congregation. Ongoing openness to the Holy Spirit is essential at all times. When engaged in public ministry, the minister is not speaking solely for him- or herself. Rather, the minister is representing the community of the church, and thus must be willing to use words and phrases that refer to God in an inclusive manner, and to the people of the world in affirming, supportive ways. Those who have been ordained have an obligation to speak supportively of the church that has granted them the right and privilege to serve in the priesthood.

## **Four Worship Leadership Skills**

While there are many different skills and gifts that can be utilized in corporate worship, four foundational ones are planning, presiding, preaching, and praying.

1. **Planning.** It is the responsibility of every congregational pastor to ensure that regular worship services are planned and conducted. Planning varies from congregation to congregation. Some have a planning group. Others rely on the presider to plan. Still others have the presider and one planner work together as a team. The method used often depends on the size and style of the congregation. More important than the method is that the service be planned in advance so that each participant might fully prepare, and that the service be designed in a way that is cohesive, relevant, and sensitive to the needs of the worshiping community. It is a good idea for the presider to have complete knowledge of the service so that she or he might help guide the service with confidence.

Worship planning should be conducted by those with both the desire and skill to do so. Not all members of the congrega-

tion have the capacity to plan corporate worship. Those who regularly plan services should avail themselves of workshops, seminars, and training sessions conducted by the mission center or World Church.

Most congregations are increasingly receptive to new forms or elements of worship. Some of these include drama, dance, small-group sharing, films, and physical movement within the room. Even so, planners are wise to keep services simple in design and flow, with only one or two elements that are new or different to the group. Moreover, the introduction of new hymn texts sung to familiar tunes is fairly easy to do, but the use of a new tune often requires rehearsal before the service. A worship service filled with many new elements is often disruptive rather than edifying.

In recent years, worship planning in the Community of Christ has been greatly enhanced by *Worship Resources*, an annual publication of the Worship Ministries Office of the World Church. This comprehensive book (also available online) provides excellent assistance in the following areas:

- The nature of worship planning and preaching
- Resource suggestions
- Use of the Revised Common Lectionary
- Weekly worship suggestions, themes, and sermon helps
- Additional resources for special seasons and occasions
- Congregational planning calendar

Many congregations choose to start with the weekly worship suggestions and adapt them to the local group, particularly if the group is small and without someone who has the skill to perform the suggested worship element. *Worship Resources* is designed primarily for the church in developed nations; however, the use of the suggested weekly scriptures and themes serves to unify the worldwide church.

2. **Presiding.** Most worship services in the Community of Christ are presided over by an ordained minister. (See previous section, “The Role of Priesthood in Worship,” page 152, for additional information.) Every priesthood member should be versed in worship presiding and should seek additional training through Temple School courses, Community of Christ

Seminary, Congregational Leaders Workshop, and other educational settings.

The presiding function requires the minister to thoroughly understand the scriptural base of the theme and the desired outcome, to inform each participant as to his or her specific responsibilities, to ensure the logistics have been thought through and that the service will run smoothly, and to lead the congregation through the experience. Good presiding requires more effort before the service than during it and draws little attention to the presider. The presider should also be prepared to handle unusual circumstances that may arise during the course of the worship, in the manner least disruptive to the body.

The presider should also see that the worship location has been properly cleaned, prepared, and arranged for the service that has been planned. The presider also sets the tone of the worship—be it formal, informal, creative, traditional, reflective, or celebratory.

Immediately before the service, the presider should gather the worship leaders in a quiet location, review the logistics of the service, and offer a brief prayer for all who are engaged in the worship experience.

Presiding includes the ministry of hospitality, helping the worshipers feel included and welcome. It is also important that the presider be aware of the needs of the congregation and be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

3. **Preaching.** Many ordained ministers will be called on to preach. Even so, some in the ministry do not have, or have not cultivated, the gift of preaching. Such individuals should be used in other forms of public ministry.

Preaching is central to many worship services. It is often the primary vehicle for the delivery of God's word. Preaching is a difficult ministerial skill to cultivate, for it involves the successful integration of several foundational skills—sound theological thinking, scriptural study and education, and public speaking. It demands that the preacher understand contemporary culture as well as unique circumstances of the congregation.

Unless there is strong reason to the contrary, sermons in the Community of Christ should be based on the suggested

scripture for the day (as found in *Worship Resources*). The sermon should relate to the daily theme, but arise from the scripture itself. This requires the preacher to study not only the text, but to review sound scriptural aides such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and the preaching helps in *Worship Resources*. Preaching is interpretation of text, as applied to the current context of life, all the while inspiring the listener to respond to God's call to discipleship.

Sermon preparation cannot be done in one day or in one setting. It is best accomplished in small segments over several days. This allows the preacher time to select illustrations and phrases that responsibly relate to the message of the scripture text. Generally speaking, in the developed world a sermon should not exceed twenty minutes in length. Those who occupy the pulpit should take courses in preaching, theology, and scripture as part of a life-long process of increasing spiritual maturity and ministerial effectiveness.

4. **Public Prayer.** Public prayer is different from private prayer. Public prayer involves God, the minister, and those listening to the prayer. The minister is speaking on behalf of the community and uses words to bring counsel, hope, concern, and inspiration. Accordingly, the minister should choose inclusive words and phrases that speak to, and on behalf of, those gathered for worship. Public prayers can be prepared in writing and rehearsed, or spontaneously composed. Either way, preparation is in order. The minister should avoid repetitious phrases and should seek to use clear language that speaks to all generations of believers.

## **Other Items to Consider**

1. The worship space should be free from clutter. It should be comfortable and clean.

2. Last minute changes in the order of worship or the worship personnel should be kept to a minimum.

3. The congregation should be informed of upcoming worship experiences, particularly if there is some special element of celebration contained in the worship. People deserve a chance to prepare for an encounter with God.

4. Those involved in worship leadership should be dressed in a manner common to the congregation and its generally understood expectations. Those of a younger generation should not be expected to dress in a manner similar to those who are older. Even so, all should show respect for the group as a whole when dressing and grooming for worship.

5. The use of ushers who are informed and sensitive to the physical needs of the congregation greatly benefits the worship experience.

6. If worship participants are seated in front of the congregation, they should draw minimal attention to themselves while others are giving ministry. They should be attentive to all aspects of the worship and model the demeanor sought from the congregation.

7. After the service has ended, the presider and planner should assess the service to determine if any pastoral follow-up is needed, and to determine if any parts of the service were ineffective and perhaps not to be repeated in future services. The pastor should be informed of any important observations or situations noted in the course of the service.

8. Informal events such as campfires and song services may lend themselves to a brief period of worship. Although informal, some preparation is still in order.



## Chapter 16

# Preaching Ministry

### Sacramental Word

The central focus of worship is divine encounter. James White defines Christian worship as “the deliberate act of approaching reality at its greatest depth by becoming aware of God through Jesus Christ and responding to that awareness.”<sup>1</sup> In a sense, we worship to be reminded of the salvation acts we already know yet constantly forget. What role does preaching have in this? William J. Close, current president of Atlantic School of Theology [2004], says, “The art of preaching drives toward a goal of speaking the hope that is within us. That hope may seek to awaken faith, instill courage, share supportive love, or mobilize for social justice, but to do so it must be framed in a compelling and winsome manner.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of preaching is not so much to *do theology* as it is to *extend an invitation*—to invite preacher and listener to engage the Holy Spirit in conversation.

Preaching is ultimately a sacred conversation—an experience wherein both preacher and listener encounter what Donald Coggin refers to as “the sacrament of the Word.”<sup>3</sup> Coggin, retired Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury says, “Effective preaching is not merely a series of words or reports; instead, it is intended by God as an actual creative extension of the Word of Life.”<sup>4</sup> A presentation may be well crafted, theologically sound, masterfully delivered, and entertaining, but if it does not clearly proclaim the redeeming grace of the gospel it will not be a sermon!

For some, preaching is not a sacred act but simply an elongated lesson that dominates a worship service. We have be-

come so adept at dividing the sacred from the secular that we divide the sacred from the *not-as-sacred*. All sacraments are symbolic in nature and are a means of divine communication. The symbols of water, bread, wine, consecrated oil, and laying on of hands serve to say something that cannot be said in any other way. They are ordinary things made extraordinary. They become redemptive agents blessed beyond their everyday capacity. We encounter and appropriate the redeeming presence of the Divine by participating in the messages they convey. Divine encounter made possible by preaching is no less valid than the rites we traditionally refer to as sacramental. The redeeming power of the Holy Spirit actualized through aural symbolism renders the act of preaching a sacred conversation. In Thomas Troeger's words in *Imagining the Sermon*,

In a sense, the voice of the preacher is an aural symbol, just as the chalice, the altar, and the cross are visual symbols. Paul Tillich has said that they draw us beyond what they are in themselves toward the ultimate reality that is their source, and this is precisely what good sermons do. The preacher's voice uses words and the physical properties of sound to draw people beyond the message that is being articulated into the presence of God.<sup>5</sup>

Many factors contribute to preaching's salvific hope, but for preaching to be sacramental its primary ingredient must be the Holy Spirit. Sermons must begin with the Spirit, be preached with the Spirit, and transform by the Spirit. They must be wisely constructed on solid footing and must carry the music of God's Spirit from foundation to roof. Without the Spirit, the music is dead.

## **Preaching as Witness**

A sermon is not a paper, a talk, a lecture, or a presentation; it is a proclamation of the good news—a *personal* witness. The great Christian preacher Philips Brooks said, "Preaching is the sharing of truth through personality." A sermon void of personal testimony is impotent. The gospel—not the preacher—is the central focus of the sermon. Nevertheless, the preacher's ethos or character conveys the message. Someone

once said, “You cannot bring anyone closer to Jesus than you are.” It can be argued that no one brings anyone to Jesus. Regardless, the point of this saying shouts an important principle: one’s ethical life and Christian discipleship are always up for review—and they speak volumes above, beneath, around, and within a message delivered behind a pulpit. Preachers are not only heard, they are “overheard.” Are you one with your word? Are you credible? Does your personal witness wing the truth of the message on the wind of the Spirit? The foundation of good preaching *is* the Holy Spirit which doesn’t just show up for twenty minutes on Sunday morning but is invested *in* the preacher and in the discovery, shaping, delivery, and receiving of the message shared.

## Hard Work and Foolishness

God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

—I Corinthians 1:21–23

Preaching is hard work. It demands our best. Whenever we think we get by with a “Saturday night special” we are foolish. Cracking open a can of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, or thumbing through this month’s *Reader’s Digest* for a cute story or a clever quotation Saturday evening will not satisfy the hunger of today’s discerning congregation. Whenever we dust off last year’s sermon from the file cabinet without thought of Sunday’s listeners and their needs—we are foolish. Whenever we try to find enough material to “fill the hour,” we are foolish. Whenever we pull together a string of scripture verses and desperately knit them together into some cogent thought, or give them no thought at all, we are foolish. Whenever we say, “Preaching’s not my gift, so I’ll not work at it,” we are foolish. The list goes on and on. It is not the foolishness of preaching but the foolishness of preachers that threatens a sermon’s value. We need to take the fool out of “foolishness,” and that begins with getting an important message.

## Getting a Message

You cannot build a sermon until you know what you want to say. You must *have something important to say*; you must *want desperately to say it*; you must *say it well*. Where do you get such an important message?

Sermon preparation *begins with listening* because preaching is rooted in response—response to the voice of experience, the voices of culture, the needs of the congregation, the guidance of God’s Spirit, and response to God’s word expressed in personal witness and holy writ.

Prayerful sermon preparation begins by listening to the scripture text suggested by the assigned theme, lectionary text, or topic to be addressed. Have your own experience with the text *before* leapfrogging into available reference materials! This means reading it aloud for your own hearing. It is helpful to use as many translations as are available. Reading the chapter that precedes and follows the selected text will help clarify context. When reading scripture aloud, listen to the many voices speaking through the text: *What is being said here? What is not being said? What am I hearing that I have not heard before? Are there verses, phrases, or words that claim my attention?*

When the preacher goes to the scripture, new ground is not being broken. The church has been to this text before—many times—and a theological tradition is, in part, the church’s memory of past encounters with this and other biblical texts.... [T]he interpreter arrives not as a disoriented stranger but as a pilgrim returning to a familiar land, recognizing old landmarks and thereby alert for new and previously unseen wonders.<sup>6</sup>

Preachers should invest themselves deeply in research. Certainly the voices uncovered by biblical criticism, commentaries, and theological reference materials should be heard. Scholarly works are extremely important tools. Establish a personal library of such materials and make frequent use of them. But first things first: let the text speak initially for itself. Following a naïve reading of the text, complement your study using resources that provide sound theological and historical context. As you immerse

yourself in the text a central idea will emerge. Transform your central idea into a thesis statement (i.e., the sermon's message expressed in one or two sentences). The hard work is done. You now know what you want to say. The question is, *How will you say it?* The message must be shaped!

## Shaping the Sermon

Effective sermons take listeners on a journey. The trick is to get them to hop on board, stay with you for the entire trip, and to make the final destination worth their while. But it's more than that. If the journey does not in some way actualize an *encounter* with the Holy, it will be just a pleasant (or unpleasant) excursion. "All sermons ask for nothing and for everything. That is, they do not ask for a specific, 'Now you must do such and such or give so and so.' They ask for a change of heart."<sup>7</sup>

The journey can be direct or indirect. Sermons are either deductive or inductive. Deductive sermons announce the destination of the journey near the beginning and proceed to establish reasons for going there, while inductive sermons *hint* at the final destination. In other words, the indirect model invites listeners on an exploration. They're not absolutely sure where you are going—but they know you know and are willing to travel with you. Either model can be equally effective as long as the trip has some healthy tension and suspense—some unexpected twists and turns. In other words, a sermon should preach like a mystery novel. Obviously you cannot build anticipation if you *begin with your strongest argument*. Build toward it. Arrange your ideas and points so they escalate toward a climax in thought and feeling, remembering that your material will be secondary to the witness you bear.

Sermons generally follow either a propositional or narrative pattern. **Propositional sermons** (sometimes called argument sermons) are constructed around a major declaration or thesis statement that is supported by three or four points designed to persuade the listener. They follow a basic outline: *introduction*, *major points* (often reinforced by illustrations), *climax* (the major thesis stated or restated), and *conclusion*.

**Narrative sermons** (or story sermons) are constructed around a narrative plot; that is, they allow *story* to be the vehicle that contains the central message or aim of the sermon. In other words, narrative sermons do not proceed from one argument (or point) to another but are shaped like parables that *house* the gospel message being shared. Propositional and narrative models are equally effective in developing (1) expository/exegetical sermons (homilies that uncover scriptural meaning and interpretation), (2) topical sermons, (3) ethical sermons, and (4) doctrinal sermons.

Good preaching relies on a keen eye and an attentive ear to life. It is fed by the creative juices of the imagination. Sermon ideas and illustrations abound in everyday conversations, film and television productions, stories read, testimonies heard, music, drama, newspapers, magazines, commercials... and the list goes on. Draw deeply from the rich well of experience around you and give the creative spirit of your imagination free reign. Jot down important thoughts and ideas; be playful and tease out new meanings from old understandings. As one preacher put it, “The pulpit should be more playground than podium.”

## Delivery

Sermon delivery begins *before* the sermon is preached. Ensure that the words and phrases of your manuscript and notes are composed for the ear, the mind, and the heart. Effective language can shorten the distance between sacred and secular. Examine your manuscript and remember that a sermon is not a theological paper. Admittedly, a sanctuary gives license for some theological language but use common sense. Avoid “in-house” language. Denominationally nuanced terms—such as “the D. and C.,” “Council of Twelve,” “Seventy,” “the Center Place,” “Zion”—are not readily understood by visitors and friends of the church. So the first step in sharpening sermon delivery is to make sure what you want to say will be said clearly and connects easily with the listener.

The following are good guidelines for effective delivery:

- Do not apologize for deficiencies or inabilities.

- Be yourself. Don't attempt to imitate someone else's style. Charismatic speakers need not be pulpit-pounders or "game-show" hosts.
- Be wary of the use of humor. (It can work to one's detriment as well as benefit.)
- Make eye contact with listeners.
- Vary the tone, volume, and pacing of your voice.
- Make effective use of silence.
- Gesture naturally. (Again, be yourself—some people are more animated than others.)
- Read sparingly. (Do not be enslaved by your notes—if you read from a particular quoted work, attribute it and practice reading it aloud beforehand.)
- Move naturally and be sensitive. (For example, will the congregation be uneasy if you do not use the pulpit?)
- Paint word-pictures. (Use picturesque terms.)
- Economize. (Don't say more than you need to say. Sermons do not *fill* time; they *shape* time. Don't overextend your welcome.)

## Be Real

If preaching is the sharing of truth through personality, then preachers and preaching need to be real. Preachers do not have all the answers to life's ambiguities and agonizing questions, and listeners know that. They don't expect to have all their problems solved, but they do expect honesty and integrity. Preachers are fellow travelers on the path of discipleship, not tour guides. This does not suggest that sermons should not tackle thorny issues.

The willingness to dialogically address ethical questions from the pulpit (even when agreement or consensus may be far reaching) can be beneficial if done so with grace and humility. Listeners live in a world of choices, and though they may not expect specific answers to controversial issues, they rightly anticipate the church will provide some moral grounding.

We live in challenging times, and the gospel is equal to the demands of a postmodern world. Listeners still respect the inspired word of scripture, but they want it cemented in the reality of experience. Thomas H. Troeger, minister and prolific

contemporary Christian writer, says that “modern preaching sought to bring recognized authorities into harmony with each other, while postmodern preaching works under the suspicion of all authority that now pervades our culture.”<sup>8</sup> Troeger contends that if we do not ground our sermons in the actuality of experience, the authority of what we say will be suspect. Appeals to scripture or tradition do not carry sufficient weight in themselves. The point is, we are not separate from the postmodern age in which we live, and our sensitivity to its patterns of transformation can be used effectively to create sermons that resonate with these patterns. Rosemary Radford Reuther describes this as a process in which we appropriate the past, not to remain in its limits but to point to new futures.<sup>9</sup>

We preach for a verdict. We preach to encourage. We preach to convert and redeem. We preach because lives are blessed and transformed through the sacramental word of preaching—wherein the vision, mission, and celebration of the gospel are made real as graced by a future filled with God’s love, hope, and eternal promise.

## Notes

1. James F. White, *New Forms of Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1971), 40.
2. William J. Close, sermon delivered at Fairview United Church of Canada (Nova Scotia, Canada: October 27, 2000).
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining the Sermon* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1990), 71.
6. Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1989), 53.
7. “Introduction from the Back Seat,” in *Journal of Stewardship* 47, eds. Elizabeth Muir and Vincent Alfano (Ecumenical Center for Stewardship Studies: 1995): 3.
8. Troeger, 122.
9. Rosemary Radford Reuther, quoted in Troeger, 131.

## Chapter 17

# Leading the Prayer and Fellowship Service

### Purpose

Although the way of discipleship is personal, it is far from private. We are part of a faith community, and it is important for us to have opportunities to share with one another regarding our struggles, dreams, needs, and experiences on our journey of faith. The prayer and fellowship service is intended to give people the opportunity for this kind of sharing, within the context of worship.

Due to the great diversity of congregations throughout the church, no single model for prayer and fellowship services will suffice. Instead, this service may (and should) assume different styles from place to place and from time to time. In some congregations, it may make a great deal of sense to hold prayer and fellowship services in a formal, highly structured manner. In other congregations, it will make more sense to foster this type of worshipful sharing in a more casual, informal manner. Consequently, some prayer and fellowship services will be accompanied by hymn singing, orders of worship, and will “feel” like a formal church service. On the other hand, some services will be characterized by eating, laughter, informal conversation, and will “feel” more like a group of friends sharing together in someone’s living room.

Whatever approaches are used, the purpose of the prayer and fellowship service is to create a time and place for disciples and seekers to renew their relationship with God as they share their lives with each other through prayer and the sharing of personal experience.

## **Preparing to Lead Worship**

As ordained ministers, our preparation for leading prayer and fellowship services should occur in at least two areas. First, we should hold the people in our hearts and be prayerful for them as individuals and as a gathered congregation. Few things are more important than this as we prepare to lead worship.

Second, and just as important, is our need to plan well. Meaningful worship does not need to be complex or flamboyant. In fact, worship can often be powerful and transforming in its simplicity. Nevertheless, when preparing for the prayer and fellowship service, there are a few simple, yet important elements that the minister should give attention to in his or her planning.

### **Environment**

The sights, smells, arrangement, and overall “feel” of the worship space are among the first experiences we have when we come to a service of worship. Consequently, the minister at the prayer and fellowship service will want to consider how to arrange a physical setting that most effectively leads participants into the type of worship envisioned for that service. For example, one service may call for candlelight and soft music if a tone of quiet reflection is desired. Another service might call for a small table to be set up, with objects placed on it that symbolize the thematic focus of the worship. Still another service might be best prepared for by allowing participants to simply gather and chat with one another until the minister calls their attention together.

Likewise, the location of the service itself, along with how chairs are arranged, will have an effect on the experience of worship. For instance, it may not be conducive to worship to have a small group of people sit in rows in a large sanctuary while they move through a formal order of service. Rather, it may be much more helpful if those persons had opportunity to sit in a circle in a smaller room and share in a manner that is more stylistically aligned with how friends and family naturally share with one another. Whatever the case may be, the wise minister will give attention to the matter of environment.

## Music

Nothing creates the tone or enhances the experience of worship more than music. Consequently, the minister will want to give careful attention to the musical selections chosen for the prayer and fellowship service. This relates to both congregational singing and to other musical expressions that may be used.

Instrumental music or special offerings by soloists or groups can be priceless in creating an atmosphere for worship. Not every congregation will have gifted musicians or vocalists, but where it is possible, the strategically located instrumental or vocal selection can be a great blessing in deepening the experience. It is critical, of course, to make sure that the tune, tempo, and words (if a vocal selection) be appropriate for stimulating whatever kind of reflection or mood is intended for that portion of the service.

Regarding congregational singing, the minister will want to consider some basic questions. The first question is: *If a primary purpose of worship is to “move us somewhere” (into a greater awareness of God’s presence, into praise, into repentance, into deeper relationship with one another, etc.), then where do we want a particular song to take us?* In other words, it is important to select songs for congregational singing that have both words and music that are appropriate for where we want that song to take us in that moment.

The second question for the minister is: *Does my congregation know this song?* If not, then perhaps a different selection should be made, unless the congregation will have opportunity to learn it ahead of time. The experience of worship is not enhanced by the congregation struggling through an unfamiliar song. (Of course, some groups do not enjoy singing at all. In these cases, it is certainly not necessary for a congregation to sing in order to have a meaningful prayer and fellowship service. If congregational singing does not enhance the worship experience, then there is no need to impose it.)

A third question might be: *Will there be musical accompaniment or will someone be leading the singing without accompaniment?* Either way, the presiding minister should make sure the accompanist or song leader is aware of what tempo he or she would like the song to be sung.

## **Opportunity for Prayer**

True prayer can be one of the most intimate experiences that humans have. Consequently, to pray in the presence of others has the potential to be quite meaningful for both the one who prays and for those who hear the prayer. How a presiding minister invites the congregation into a time of prayer may vary from service to service. Sometimes the minister may plan for a period of prayer before the sharing of testimonies (especially if he or she believes this will help the congregation prepare for such sharing). On the other hand, there may be some services where a period of prayer is entered into after a period of testimony, so that people may pray for one another with the benefit of having just heard one another's stories. Likewise, some services may be structured to allow individuals to pray at various times during the service.

Depending on the needs of the people and the unique circumstance of each service, some periods of prayer may be quite brief, while other services may call for a greater amount of prayer time. Those invited to offer special prayers (such as an invocation) should be asked in advance to give them time to prepare.

From time to time, it may be helpful if the minister asks people to pray who have the ability to pray sincerely and simply but without a great deal of flamboyance. Doing so may help model for others that the time of prayer is not only for those who have an articulate command of language but also for those who desire to open their heart to God in the presence of their friends. Such invitations, of course, should be made privately before the service, because the wise minister never wants to embarrass anyone by putting him or her on the spot without warning. Whatever the case may be, the opportunity to pray with one another is an important experience for the community of faith.

## **Opportunity for Testimony**

Someone once said, "We never really understand our own story until someone else hears it." In our fast-paced culture, the gift of listening to one another's stories can be a wonderful

blessing. The opportunity for people to open their lives to one another in the safe, supportive environment of the community of faith is vital to the prayer and fellowship service.

In some congregations there is little need for the presiding minister to instruct worshipers on what the nature of this sharing should be. In other congregations, though, it may be necessary from time to time to remind the congregation about the nature of testimonial sharing. Basically, the reminder should include the affirmation that testimonial sharing is to be

- **experience-based:** Testimonial sharing should not be a philosophical discourse but a simple telling of “here’s what is happening in my life...”;
- **reflective of recent times in our lives:** Stories from our past are clearly formative, important, and have their place. However, a primary purpose of the prayer and fellowship service is to support one another in our faith journey as we are currently attempting to live it out. Consequently, the retelling of old stories alone are sometimes not as appropriate as sharing what’s happening in our current life experience.; and
- **simple and brief:** We’re opening our lives to our friends, not making presentations to an audience. We should avoid the temptation to tack on words of advice or counsel to one another.

## Focus on Christ

At the center of the prayer and fellowship service is the focus on Jesus Christ. It is the stewardship of the presiding (and planning) minister to create an experience of worship (whether formal or informal) that points people to Jesus Christ. This should be the main thread woven throughout the service.

## Scripture and Theme Development

Herein lies one of the challenges of planning and presiding at prayer and fellowship services. On one hand, to lead a service without any thematic direction at all can invoke confusion and an unhelpful lack of focus. On the other hand, people come to this service with experiences and needs that many

times cannot be easily fit into a narrowly stated theme. Consequently, the minister should take care to engage in theme development that is focused enough to invoke thoughtful reflection but broad enough to avoid unnecessary restrictions.

For instance, suppose that a given service has “God’s Healing Touch” as its theme. If the minister asks worshipers to think about a time when they were sick and felt God’s healing presence, then he or she has automatically limited the potential sharing in that service to those who have had a very particular experience. On the other hand, the minister could affirm God’s desire for us to be whole in the entirety of our lives (body, mind, spirit, relationships, etc.) and then invite people to think about how they are experiencing—or need to experience—God’s healing touch (broadening the opportunities for sharing).

The use of scripture is a central element in theme development. In this regard, it is not necessary for the minister to prepare a mini-sermon or expound at length on a scriptural passage. Quite the contrary, it is much more helpful at the prayer and fellowship service if participants are simply given the chance to hear the scripture and let it speak to their lives without interpretation. The minister’s role in this service is simply to help them encounter the living word of scripture in a manner that causes them to reflect on the scripture’s meaning in their lives. One way to do this is as follows:

1. Select the passage that will be used as a theme scripture.

2. Use a good commentary, Bible dictionary, or annotated study Bible to discover the historical and cultural setting of that scripture.

3. Share the background and setting of the scripture with the congregation. There’s no need for scholarly discourse here, but it will be helpful to share enough information to help the congregation understand the context from which a particular scripture has come and why it may have been “voiced” that way, given its context.

4. Briefly hold up this scripture in relation to the theme of the service, and invite worshipers to reflect on how the scripture speaks to their life.

## **Weaving It All Together**

As stated earlier, there is no single model for what the prayer and fellowship service should look like, and the following two outlines are not intended as templates to be used everywhere. They are simply offered here as examples.

### ***Formal, More Traditional Style***

(Various group sizes)

Environment: soft music, chairs in circle, visible worship center with theme elements, worshipers gathering quietly (anticipating an experience of prayer and sharing within the context of a somewhat structured order of worship)

Welcome

Opening hymn(s)

Prayer(s) of Invocation

Hymns and/or prayers of praise

Focus scripture and brief thematic remarks

Invitation to share what's happening in our lives—(testimonies in response to theme) following meditation music

Meditation music (piano, guitar, flute, etc., to help people reflect quietly on their lives in relation to the theme)

Time for congregational sharing (Testimonies)

Invitation to a time of praying for ourselves and one another

Hymn of prayer

Time of prayer (May be brief or more lengthy, depending on needs and circumstances)

Closing statement by presiding minister (Depending on what has transpired in the service, this could be a statement of encouragement, hope, challenge, etc.)

Closing hymn

Closing prayer

## ***Informal, More Casual Style***

(Groups of 15 or less—so in some places, congregations may have more than one group)

Environment: refreshments, chairs in circle, people talking and greeting one another (anticipating an informal evening with friends in which they will eat, drink, and chat with each other about what’s happening in their lives and faith journey; refreshments may be shared before, after, or during the worship). Informality is key here. The experience should “feel” less like a formal meeting and more like friends getting together to support and care for one another.

Welcome

Ice breaker (a simple question calling for brief responses, such as the following: How was your day? In one word or phrase, how are you feeling? If you could sum up this past week in a logo or symbol, what would that be?)

Prayer(s) for our time together

Focus scripture and brief thematic remarks

Invitation to share what’s happening in our lives (informal sharing that at times may become conversational)

Invitation to pray for one another (this might be one or two prayers concerning the overall theme, or it could be individuals who pray in response to specific prayer requests by those in the group)

Statement of appreciation and invitation to “next time”

Closing prayer

(This service may use music also if it is “natural” to do so within the context of informal group sharing.)

## **Flexibility**

A key to effective ministry in the prayer and fellowship service is a willingness to be flexible. This is not a service where people march in lockstep through a cast-in-stone order of worship. Rather, as they pray and share together, special needs and opportunities may arise. Some services may take on an unexpected degree of joy-

ful exuberance and laughter, prompting the minister to alter some elements to better facilitate the sharing of this joy. Some services may be powerfully impacted by someone sharing a traumatic experience that just occurred in her or his life, and the wise minister may spontaneously decide to dedicate a major portion of the service to prayer for that person.

The need for flexibility does not relieve the minister of responsibility for thoughtful preparation. In fact, diligent preparation may help the minister become even more sensitive to the needs of the congregation, which may necessitate flexibility during the service.

## **The Way Ahead**

There is a great need in our world for safe places where people can share their hopes, pains, and dreams. There is great need in the life of disciples for a place to find personal support for the faith journey. When conducted with sensitivity and skill, the prayer and fellowship service can provide a meaningful setting for this ministry. The call is for ministers who can implement this ministry in a fashion that is relevant and compelling for our time and place.



## Chapter 18

# Celebrating the Sacraments

To you who hear my voice and know my promises I will reveal myself and give my peace, even in the midst of your uncertainties. Indeed, I am longing to pour out greater blessings than you have ever known if you, my people, will open yourselves through preparation, study, and prayer. Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. Seek for greater understanding of my purposes in these sacred rites and prepare to receive a renewed confirmation of the presence of my Spirit in your experiences of worship.

—Doctrine and Covenants 158:11a–c

### Nature of the Ordinances and Sacraments

Liturgically we use the words “ordinance” and “sacrament” interchangeably. However, meanings of these terms differ. All acts of worship are by nature and intent sacramental; that is, they serve as a means for divine–human encounter. A sacramental experience, of course, is not limited to corporate or private acts of worship. One can have a sacramental experience watching a sunset, hearing a bird sing, or driving through the mountains.

The word **ordinance** comes from the Latin word *ordinant*—(*ordinans*, present participle of *ordinare*), which means, “to put in order.” Ordinance is defined as “an authoritative decree or direction...something ordained or decreed by fate or a deity...a prescribed usage, practice, or ceremony.”<sup>1</sup> Yale and Brockway wrote, “An ordinance of God is any decree or commandment of God which has to do with ordering the universe for the good of humankind.”<sup>2</sup>

Ordinance then has to do with “orderliness”—putting things in proper alignment. In other words, an ordinance is a decreed worship ritual that follows a particular procedure symbolizing God’s “action in our lives.” It is a special act of worship in which we have a “lively awareness” of God’s “doing” in our lives—an act wherein we remember God’s sustaining grace. In a sense, an ordinance is both the specific authoritative act and the form or procedure by which the rite is performed—that is, the mechanics or particular way the rite is done.

**Sacrament** is derived from the Latin word *sacramentum*, meaning “an oath of allegiance,” and from the Latin *sacrare* (“to consecrate”). A sacrament is defined as “a Christian rite that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.” While ordinance describes the act and process of a holy rite, sacrament refers to what happens between the worshiper and God during the act.

Sacrament involves consecration (“to make sacred”). Sacrament brings about covenant making and remaking—a mutuality of *gift* and *response*.

This act, or rite, involves a pledge or token or symbol to signify a spiritual bond between God and *humankind*. To the church, a sacrament is a rite enjoined by Christ on his disciples, administered under his authority, and shared in his Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

God always blesses us through the ordinances, but blessings must be received and appropriated. For example, bread and wine can be blessed and served, but if worshipers are *not* giving of themselves (i.e., not consciously, purposefully, and prayerfully *receiving* the Communion emblems) sacrament will *not* take place. One can go through all the proper procedures of an ordinance and through neglect render the experience unsacramental. Sacrament presupposes that there will be a change in understanding, attitude, and behavior by the worshiper.

Returning to our general usage of these terms, we can say that the ordinances/sacraments involve the

- symbol
- ordinance (the orderliness)
- covenant (solemn agreement between the candidate and God)
- sacrifice (the sense of an offering from God)
- rite (the fixed procedures)
- intermediary (priesthood)
- recipient

Peter A. Judd in his book *The Sacraments* wrote, “The sacraments are vehicles of God’s action and revelation in the lives of human beings” and characterize their import accordingly:

- In the sacraments Christ is present.
- In the sacraments the church is renewed.
- The sacraments are expressions of the covenant relationship between God and humanity.
- The sacraments are performed in response to Christ’s instruction.
- The sacraments provide opportunity for remembering Christ.
- The sacraments are acts of obedience to God....Obedience is seen here not so much as the response to demands or commandments but more as adherence to basic principles or “natural” laws of God’s created order.
- The sacraments use common things to symbolize intangible reality. A sacrament is defined in the Anglican (Episcopal) catechism as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”
- The sacraments are acts of the corporate body. When one individual is blessed, baptized, or confirmed, the whole body of the church participates in the sacrament.
- The sacraments serve as avenues to new life.<sup>4</sup>

## Holistic Acts

The ordinances and sacraments are holistic acts and employ all of our faculties to allow God to disclose to us the nature of reality. They allow us to express most fully our devotion and commitment. The statement, “God saw everything that he had made,

and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31) speaks to our whole being in the ordinances. We respond physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially because our response to God is total. We are involved in physical action, drama, and speech in ways that cause us to understand most accurately what it is God is requiring of us and what it means to yield our lives to Christ and be a new person. We are involved mentally as we understand the meaning of the sacrament. We respond physically in the acts that dramatize the meaning of our covenants. We respond emotionally and we are linked with the church spiritually and socially in participating with the groups that make up the body.

The sacraments are an extension of the ministry of incarnation in which God uses human nature and material things to express godliness tangibly in humankind. God does this for our salvation. When Christ is understood as the “word...made flesh” (see John 1:14), it is helpful to us in comprehending the sacraments as a continuing means by which Christ extends divine power into the church and the world for giving spiritual life and salvation.

## **Preparation for Sacraments**

The sacraments should be observed with due reverence and preparation. Specific preparation should begin as early as possible after ministers learn they will officiate in an ordinance. Such preparation is undertaken in the spirit of meditation and prayer as expressed by Alma: “O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart” (Mosiah 9:43). Priesthood should strive to preserve simplicity and spontaneity of feeling and expression, and maintain a dignified manner, though care should be taken not to be artificially formal or excessively ceremonial.

Preparation of all participants points toward greater personal understanding of the meaning and implications of the sacrament. Meditation and prayer are essential to prepare one’s mind and spirit for these sacred rites. Informing participants ahead of time of the procedures and their part in the performance of the rite is advisable and helpful. A reverent and humble attitude should be encouraged.

## Special Directions

The sacraments include baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper (Communion), laying on of hands for the sick (administration), blessing of children, ordination, marriage, and the evangelist's blessing. The performance of ministry in each of these areas should always be with the knowledge and approval of, or at the request of, the pastor.

Every minister officiating in a baptism, confirmation, ordination, blessing of a child, or marriage is required to report promptly to the Office of Membership Records on the prescribed report form, and marriages must be reported to the proper public official. Marriage not affecting a church member is an exception to the reporting requirement to the church.

When celebrating ordinances and sacraments, care should be taken to ensure that the particular ordinance in question is the central focus of the worship service. All liturgical elements—hymns, prayers, homily, etc.—should enhance and direct worshipers toward the ordinance being celebrated. Worship planners should avoid having more than one ordinance in a service. Stacking several ordinances in a worship experience can devalue their import and effectiveness in the life of the congregation.

The ordinances and sacraments employ a greater measure of our whole being to express our devotion, commitment, and covenants with God. In the ordinances we understand more accurately the sacramental nature of creation and respond more fully to God's love, power, and holiness.

## Notes

1. Definitions of the words "ordinance" and "sacrament" are taken from the *Merrriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary: Merriam-Webster Online Language Center*.
2. Alfred H. Yale and Charles E. Brockway, *Ordinances and Sacraments of the Church* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1962), 8.
3. *Ibid.*, 12.
4. Peter A. Judd, *The Sacraments: An Exploration into Their Meaning and Practice in the RLDS Church*, rev. ed. (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1992), 11–12.



## Chapter 19

# The Baptismal Service

### The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism in the Community of Christ has many meanings. Some of the most significant include the following:

- commitment to follow Christ
- entrance into the body of Christ
- an act of repentance
- expression of faith and trust
- gateway to salvation
- new birth and new life
- engaging in mission
- remission of sin
- covenant with God
- demonstration of God's love
- obedience to God's command
- recognition of faithfulness<sup>1</sup>

Like each of the sacraments of the church, baptism brings together the influence of the Holy Spirit, the example of the life of Jesus Christ, and one's personal commitment of faith.<sup>2</sup> The scriptures provide the foundation for our understanding of the meaning of baptism.

In Matthew 3:13–17 Jesus' baptism is recorded as an example and an invitation for all who choose to follow him. Jesus' conversation with John the Baptist clarifies the importance of this sacramental act in the life of each disciple. In Hebrews 6:2 reference is made to the "doctrine of baptisms" as one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ.

Baptism emerges out of our human situation, and it contains an inherent sense of call

- responding to the Holy Spirit's presence in life;
- repenting;
- turning toward God;
- reconciling with our divine purpose; and
- committing to discipleship.

The call is a recognition that we are sinners (“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23); and that God through Christ has provided an invitation to new life. It is when we recognize this fact and desire with all our hearts to be in close relationship with God and God's plan that we are offered the way. In Acts 2:37–38 those who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost were persuaded of the truth of his words and were convicted by the Holy Spirit. They asked the question, “What should we do?” Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

When we experience God's unmerited love for us, just the way we are, we feel compelled to respond to God's generosity by making a covenant with God. In this covenant we repent and ask God's forgiveness. We commit to a new way of life with Christ. God, in turn, grants the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to become new people in Christ, capable of fulfilling our divine purpose. Only through this gift from God can we experience life in abundance. This empowerment is symbolized by the laying on of hands. This confirmation is often referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

As the Holy Spirit is present in the life of the newly baptized person, the principle of baptism becomes an ongoing activity of covenanting with God to accept and respond affirmatively to the ever-enlarging call that comes to us as we grow in our discipleship. Just as faith and repentance are ongoing elements of discipleship, so too is baptism more than just a single event or act. It is a continuing principle of life. When baptized, no one knows all of God's commandments or all that God will expect of them in the future. When baptized, we accept Christ

as our personal savior and life model, and we covenant to be and do what we understand God is asking of us at that time. Whether we are a child, youth, or adult, that understanding will continue to increase with our response to the Holy Spirit in our life. A disciple of Jesus Christ comes to a fuller understanding of the baptismal covenant on a regular basis as that person engages in ministries of compassion, witness, peace, and justice. This kind of commitment may be accompanied by some rebellion, fear, and reluctance to accept God's will. Yielding all of one's life and accepting the will of God in the spirit of generosity provides opportunity for experiencing again and again the principle of baptism. This "re-baptism" principle is at the heart of the disciple's participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or Communion, and thus is always available.

## **The Symbol and Significance of the Water**

The act of immersion in water is symbolic of the covenant made in baptism. It recognizes that one does not have the power personally to become Christlike in attitude or in character. The covenanting person thus yields to God's love and grace to empower this transformation. The person is immersed in water, symbolic of laying down the former sinful life and taking up a fresh new beginning with God and their faith community. It is symbolic of being washed clean in the water and coming forth not hindered by the past. As the promise of forgiveness of sins is a part of the covenant, the person is forgiven and freed from the guilt and weight of past wrongdoing. The baptismal experience also speaks to the new disciple's commitment to become "immersed" in Christ's message, mission, and community. Thus, baptism is a public witness before God and the church that one's life is dedicated to Christ and to living out that discipleship in the Community of Christ. Baptism is symbolic of one's faith in Christ and of the power of the resurrection. As Christ died and rose from the grave immortal, so the "old life" of the baptized person dies and a new life emerges with the promise of immortality and eternal life.

This symbolism and its significance are found in many scriptural passages, such as John 3:5; Mark 1:7-9; Romans 6:4-5; Colossians 2:12; Doctrine and Covenants 17:21; and Mosiah 9:35-42.

## The Role of Priesthood

God has made preparation in the Community of Christ for baptism through those called to priesthood. Priesthood members should approach baptism seriously and earnestly so that the sacrament will minister in the full measure of its significance to those who participate, either by being baptized or by sharing the experience as family, friends, and members of the congregation. For those serving as Aaronic priests and Melchisedec ministers, baptizing a person is a sacred responsibility. The nature of this relationship is contained in Doctrine and Covenants 83:3c: “Therefore, in the ordinances thereof the power of godliness is manifest; and without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest...” The role of the priesthood member in this ordinance has several components:

1. determining that the candidate understands the commitment being made in terms of repentance, forgiveness, and life-long discipleship;
2. guiding the candidate in making spiritual preparation for baptism;
3. coordinating with the pastor and candidate the planning of the baptismal service;
4. ensuring that the newly baptized person has a discipleship mentor to provide support (a disciple’s resource, *Walking with Jesus*, is available for study with the mentor); and
5. making personal preparation to minister and participate in the baptism.

Resources are available to assist individuals in their consideration of and preparation for baptism. The congregational missionary coordinator or mission center secretary can provide assistance in identifying appropriate materials. It is highly recommended that every person considering a baptismal covenant be engaged in a plan of study and discussion focusing on Christ and the church. Whenever possible, this experience should begin before baptism and continue after it. Prebaptismal, inquirer, and new disciple classes as well as home missionary ministry sessions are some of the ways baptismal candidates can prepare for and follow through with their

commitment. It is recommended that the officiating priesthood member be involved in these sessions or ensure that these opportunities are facilitated by others. Congregations are encouraged to have regular prebaptismal sessions for individuals of all ages.

## **Prerequisites for Baptism**

The concept of “prerequisite” infers steps that must be taken before baptism. However, the purpose of the prerequisite is to guide the person being baptized in both honoring God and scripture as well as preparing for God’s blessing. There are some scripturally specified requirements for baptism:

1. The candidate must be at least eight years of age as specified in Doctrine and Covenants 68:4b. Permission from the legal guardian of a minor requesting baptism must be received.

2. The candidate witnesses faith in Christ and true repentance as specified in Mark 1:13, Mosiah 2:6–16, and Doctrine and Covenants 16:6d.

3. The candidate should be engaged in learning about the teachings of Christ and the mission of the Community of Christ in the spirit of Doctrine and Covenants 17:7. It is appropriate for this study to occur between baptism by water and confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

## **Planning and Execution of the Sacrament**

### ***Mode***

Baptism in the Community of Christ is by complete immersion in water. Both the candidate and the priesthood member officiating should be in the water (see Doctrine and Covenants 17:21).

### ***Procedure***

1. When using a baptismal font, the officiating priesthood member first enters the body of water and, when in position, signals to the candidate to enter. The candidate next enters the water assisted by the officiating priesthood member and stands between the priesthood member and the congregation.

If the baptism occurs in a lake or river, the minister and candidate may enter the water together.

2. The minister may give any final instruction to the candidate privately at this time.

3. The presiding minister announces the name of the candidate and that of the officiating minister.

4. The officiating minister then raises one hand in an upward direction, states aloud the full name of the candidate and says, using Doctrine and Covenants 17:21b, “Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

5. The minister then lowers her or his hand to a supportive position at the candidate’s back or neck and makes a full step to sustain the weight of the candidate before the immersion and then raises the candidate to his or her feet. Often the minister will provide a clean handkerchief for the candidate to wipe the water from her or his face.

6. Care should be given to completely immerse the candidate. Failure to do so can be disconcerting to the candidate and/or some in the congregation. However, if the water does not cover a portion of the person’s body, it is inadvisable to repeat the process.

### ***Preparation***

1. The water level should be waist deep for an adult and slightly less for a child.

2. The officiating minister should inspect the baptismal area to ensure that there are no safety or other factors needing attention. This is especially true for services held outdoors. The bottom of a pond, lake, stream, or ocean should be physically inspected before the baptismal service for unexpected conditions.

3. In running streams, the candidate should face downstream so that he or she is immersed with head upstream. The flow of water will then help raise the candidate upright again and stop water from entering the nose or mouth, as well as prevent the disarray of clothing.

4. Arrangements should be made for clean dressing rooms with the necessary privacy. Someone should have a large towel available for when the candidate emerges from the water. An adult should be invited to assist a child candidate as appropriate.

### ***Dress***

There is a tradition of wearing white or light colored clothing by both the minister and the candidate. This is not required. Whatever clothing chosen should be appropriate to this sacramental experience and provide adequate covering when wet. Both the officiating minister and candidate should be dressed for the baptism before the service begins.

### ***Order of Worship***

The beauty of this sacrament is in its simplicity. The worship service usually includes these elements:

- Open with appropriate hymns or songs and prayer.
- Provide a scriptural setting for the baptismal experience.
- Share brief remarks on the nature of the sacrament and a challenge to the congregation and candidate focusing on the personal commitment of the candidate and the corporate responsibility to support and nurture the new disciple.
- Immediately preceding the baptism announce the name of the candidate and officiating minister.
- Baptism.
- Conclude with a hymn or song and prayer.

If time allows, consider having the candidate share a commitment statement before baptism. It would also be appropriate for the congregation to offer statements of support.

The use of carefully selected vocal, instrumental, or recorded music contributes significantly to this worship experience. When held outdoors, weather conditions may impact the length of the service.

Whenever possible, it is recommended that separate services be planned for the baptism and confirmation. In addition, it is generally advisable not to include a baptism with other sacraments or as an additional element in a preaching service.

Each sacrament warrants being the major focus of the worship experience.

## Notes

1. Peter A. Judd, *The Sacraments: An Exploration into Their Meaning and Practice in the RLDS Church* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1992), 23.
2. *Seekers and Disciples* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 2003), 25.

## **Chapter 20**

# **The Confirmation Service**

### **Significance of Confirmation**

Confirmation is the ordinance that confers the gift of the Holy Spirit on the person being confirmed. It is often referred to as the “baptism of the Spirit,” emphasizing its being a part of the process of becoming a member of the church. Together, baptism and confirmation bring a person into membership.

Baptism by water is symbolic of the candidate’s yielding of his or her life to God and earnestly desiring to become what the candidate senses is at that time a joining of self with Christ and the church. Confirmation is an act of bringing the Spirit to the person in response to his or her life commitment to Christ and the church. It is God’s response to the candidate’s commitment in which the Holy Spirit enters into that life to strengthen, comfort, enlighten, teach, and guide the person in fulfilling this new commitment. It is the promise of God to be one’s constant companion.

### **Preparation for Confirmation**

The candidate should be instructed before confirmation on the significance of this ordinance. The instruction may occur as part of a prebaptismal class or counseling session. The emphasis in the instruction should be that becoming a member of the church through baptism and confirmation is an explicit act whereby the individual declares to family, friends, and community an intention to follow Christ and to be a part of Christ’s church. In baptism, people offer themselves to Christ, and in confirmation God accepts their decision and confers the Holy Spirit, promising to be a supporting part of their life forever.

Instruction for understanding the “fruit of the Spirit” is central to appropriate preparation of new members for fellowship in the church. This fruit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...with a lack of conceit, competition, and envy against others (see Galatians 5:22–26).

Care should be taken to convey a natural enthusiasm and joy when receiving a new member, without setting up expectations for extraordinary experiences of some others during baptism and confirmation. Each person receives and understands the gift of God’s grace in private and individual ways that should not be conditioned or diminished by differing experiences.

It is helpful to provide candidates a description of what will occur physically in terms of placement of chairs, when to come forward and take a seat, what to do following the prayer of confirmation, and how they may be greeted following confirmation. While local customs may differ to some extent, the basic format of the ordinance calls for it to be a dignified and simple service with a focus on the act and prayer of confirmation.

## **Conduct of the Service**

Confirmation is accomplished by the laying on of hands by the Melchisedec priesthood (D. and C. 17:8). While one Melchisedec priesthood member may confirm the candidate alone, whenever possible two should place their hands on the head of the candidate while one of the elders (the “spokesperson”) offers the prayer of confirmation. Care should be taken not to rest the hands too heavily on the head of the person.

The newly baptized person or persons should be seated facing the congregation during the confirmation. Candidates are confirmed one at a time.

## **The Prayer of Confirmation**

The prayer of confirmation should be brief. Seldom does the prayer need to be longer than three minutes. It is appropriate on occasion to make a short statement to the candidate.

Such a statement might be, “Having been commissioned by Jesus Christ, we place our hands on your head to confirm you and ask God to grant the gift of the Holy Spirit. In this act we extend to you membership in the Community of Christ.” The prayer should then be addressed to God. The confirmation prayer is seldom an appropriate time to give the candidate a charge, instructions, or promises. If there is need for any of these, they should be included in other appropriate parts of the service. It is not necessary to address a statement to the candidate at all, and the entire prayer of confirmation may be addressed to God, but in no circumstances should the spokesperson alternate back and forth between addressing God and the candidate.

### **Arranging the Service**

Innovations should be used only with great care in this service. Those elements that tend to solemnize, beautify, and dignify should be included. Hymns, instrumental music, and vocal music of a religious nature may be used.

Scriptures may be read, and a charge to the candidate and congregation may be used with good effect. These should lead up to the prayer of confirmation as the climax of the service. An appropriate hymn and prayer may conclude the service. It should be made a special service or, in a small congregation, it may be part of a Communion service. While tradition has suggested separation of baptism and confirmation with each taking place in separate services, it is sometimes appropriate for both to occur in the same service. The matter of critical importance is the preparation of the candidate and the spokesperson, enabling each to be open to the touch of the Holy Spirit.

### **Follow-up Ministry**

The officiating minister should make certain that a statistical report is filed after the baptism in water and the confirmation have taken place. It is common practice in the church for a member’s manual to be presented to the new member after confirmation. *Walking with Jesus: A Member’s Guide in the*

*Community of Christ* was published in 2004 by Herald House and may be used for this purpose.

It is the responsibility of the minister to see to it that the one baptized continues to receive spiritual nurture. The minister should remain a trusted counselor in days to come.

## Chapter 21

# The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

It has long been held that sacraments are the embodiments of grace, the enacted testimonies of the love of God in Jesus Christ experienced through the Spirit in the community of faith. Augustine of Hippo called the sacraments “visible signs of an invisible grace.” Sacraments are enactments of the gospel. Through the sacraments the Holy Spirit communicates grace to us in forgiving, renewing, and promising love. By means of the sacraments we are enlivened in Jesus Christ in faith, hope, and love.

The event of baptism marks the beginning of a disciple's participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism and confirmation provide the sacramental foundation of Christian life. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or Communion as it is often called, is the sustaining of that life by that same grace. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper nourishes our growth in discipleship as it conforms to our solidarity with Christ and others, calling each one to the continued sharing of life through witness and service in the world.

Using the common things of life—bread and wine—the community of faith is invited to remember the Lord Jesus Christ. In the event of the Lord's Supper, the past, present, and future of God's creative and redemptive work are evidenced in the community of faith. Those gathered in worship are reminded that life must be sacrificed if it is to be sustained. Such moments speak to us not only of passing from death to life, but of the transcendent Risen One. We dramatize our surrender to the will of God as we remember Jesus' command: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

Speaking to the Nephites, the crucified and risen Christ proclaimed, “And if ye do always remember me, ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (III Nephi 8:36). “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” wrote the apostle Paul (Romans 8:14). Through our participation in the Lord’s Supper as a community of Christ, we are recipients of the sharing of divine life with humanity and the creation. At the same time, we are invited to participate in the divine life by sharing with each other in the body of Christ. In this communion we are reminded of our obligation of sharing our witness, “for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Romans 8:19).

## **Preparation of the Emblems**

An elder or priest may officiate in administering the emblems of bread and wine. The presiding officer of the service should oversee the planning and direct the service. The presiding officer is also to assign specific tasks to assisting priesthood. Usually an elder presides, and the priests serve the emblems to the community. Officiating ministers should be especially careful that their hands are clean, both symbolically and in actual fact.

The bread and wine should be prepared and in place before the service commences. The plates and cups should be clean. When linens are used they should be spotless and neatly pressed. White linens are customary. Before the service begins, the wine (unfermented grape juice) is poured into individual cups, and the bread may be broken completely or in part before being placed on the table. It is traditional for the emblems to remain covered until ready for the blessing and serving of the Lord’s Supper. After serving, the covering may be replaced if desired.

## **Personal Preparation**

The church enacts the Lord’s Supper as a covenant celebration, recalling each disciple’s commitment to Jesus Christ in baptism and confirmation. At the table the community remembers the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who may be in transgres-

sion, or who are offended by another, may voluntarily refrain from partaking of the emblems. In any case, it is inappropriate to make a public issue of the matter during the service.

Since 1994 the church has opened the celebration of the Lord's Supper to other Christians as well as baptized members of the Community of Christ. At the direction of the World Conference that year, the First Presidency issued guidelines for administration of the Lord's Supper,\* offering a model for the type of statement that could be made, affirming that the tradition of the Community of Christ

is to understand the Lord's Supper as a sacrament in which we remember the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and renew the covenant we made at the waters of baptism. Others who share with us may have different understandings and practices within their own faith and tradition. We invite all who participate to do so as an expression of the faithful unity and love exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, in whose name we worship.

The emblems "will be passed to all worship participants and they will be free to partake at their own initiative. No attempt should be made to determine whether persons have been baptized in some other church or whether the form of baptism is consistent with our own. The choice is with the individual." Children who are members of Community of Christ families will be invited to receive the emblems after being baptized and confirmed, which occurs after the child's eighth birthday. "Pastoral judgment should be respected in situations where further interpretation may be required."

## **Prayers of Blessing and Serving the Bread and Wine**

Before the beginning of the service, copies of the prayers of blessing over the emblems should be in the possession of the minister(s) who will read them. The prayers of blessing may be found in the front of the hymnal as well as Doctrine and Covenants 17:22–23 and in Moroni, chapters 4 and 5.

The bread is served first after it is blessed. The wine is then served after it is blessed. All who can should kneel during

the prayers of blessing. On occasion, prayers may be read, one immediately following the other, and then the bread and wine served together.

It is best to read the prayers and thus avoid the confusion that may result from forgetting the exact phrasing. Be careful to read the prayers with the proper inflection of voice, distinctly, and loud enough for all to hear.

## **The Technique of Serving**

Except in very small gatherings, it is best for two priesthood members to remove the linen covering the emblems, fold it carefully, and lay it aside in an appropriate place. After the emblems are served the trays may be left with the deacons in a hall or anteroom. If they are replaced on the table, the linen may be used to cover the vessels again. Serving usually occurs by the priest or elder moving among the congregation one row at a time. On occasion, however, the congregation may be invited to come to the front of the sanctuary to be served.

It is important to take a firm grip on the trays and to be careful to maintain balance when reaching. Servers should hold the tray low enough for worshipers to partake conveniently and serve one person at a time. It is sometimes advisable for those who serve to hand the glass of wine to aged or handicapped persons rather than let them fumble for it on the tray.

## **Arranging the Service**

The purpose of the Lord's Supper should always be discernible—communion with God. Planning and arrangement of details should lead toward a climax at the time members receive the emblems and dedicate themselves to God. In such a service the use of music (organ, piano, wind and string instruments, choral and congregational singing) is encouraged as this contributes to giving "glory to God."

Elements of the service should include a sermon or homily, scripture readings, prayer, and the blessing and serving of the Lord's Supper itself. An oblation offering for the poor and needy is a distinctive part of the service and ought not to be

neglected. Sometimes hymns are sung or scripture may be read during the serving of the emblems, though at other times meditation is encouraged with quietude or with meditative instrumental music.

When taking the Lord's Supper to the sick and shut-ins, ministers should endeavor to establish an atmosphere of reverence. Because the prayers of blessing are a part of the sacrament itself, they should be repeated. Sometimes a prayer or brief statement of the significance of the sacrament will help create the proper atmosphere. The same precautions of cleanliness, orderliness, and dignity should be observed as they are in the public worship service.

\*First Presidency, "Guidelines for Administration of the Lord's Supper," *Saints Herald* 141, no. 8 (August 1994): 4.



## Chapter 22

# The Blessing of Children

People were bringing little children to [Jesus] in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.—Mark 10:13–16

Every member of the church of Christ having children, is to bring them unto the elders before the church, who are to lay their hands upon them in the name of Jesus Christ, and bless them in his name.

—Doctrine and Covenants 17:19

And when he said these words, he wept, and the multitude bore record of it, and he took their little children, one by one, and blessed them and prayed to the Father for them.—III Nephi 8:23

The sacrament of the blessing of children in the Community of Christ recognizes the entrance of new life into the church community and comes from all three of the church’s sacred books of scripture. According to the biblical record, Jesus invited all parents to bring their children for a special blessing (Gospel of Mark). In the Book of Mormon account, Jesus illustrated the love and concern he had for children (III Nephi). We are admonished today to bring our children before the church to be blessed in the name of Jesus Christ (D. and C.).

## **Significance**

The blessing of children is a beautiful and meaningful sacrament of the Community of Christ. In this sacrament the small child is brought before the Creator by the parents or guardian for blessing in the witness of the congregation. As Peter Judd stated in his book *The Sacraments*,

the blessing symbolizes and demonstrates God's love and concern for the child. It recognizes the birth of a new individual who is unique and has worth in God's sight. In blessing, the parents, minister, and congregation recognize human dependency on God as the source and strength of life. God is requested to care for the child and to provide the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen the child as he or she grows.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the blessing represents a covenant entered into by the parent(s) or guardian, congregation, and God. Each party will endeavor to guide the child to a full and enriching life. The blessing recognizes and reminds everyone of his or her responsibility in the growth of the child during the important formative years.

## **Eligibility**

Only children under eight years of age are eligible for blessing. Children who are eight years of age or older are eligible for baptism (D. and C. 68:4b).<sup>2</sup> The Community of Christ celebrates its acceptance of every child brought before the congregation. Children of friends of the church may be blessed if their parents understand the purpose of the blessing and request the sacrament.

## **Preparation**

Arrangements are made for the blessing with the pastor of the congregation by a parent or guardian of the child. A time is selected that will permit family and friends who might need to come from a distance to attend.

An elder or high priest as spokesperson lays hands on the child and states a prayer of blessing before the nurturing family

and the congregation (see D. and C. 17:19). Usually another elder or high priest assists by holding the child. If the child is older or too large to be held, the child may be seated on a chair or in the lap of one of the parents or guardian, in which case the priesthood members lay their hands on the child's head to pronounce the blessing.

During the service the parents and family bring the child to the front of the sanctuary, where the blessing will take place. It is appropriate for other significant family members to join them.

The prayer should be brief and loud enough for all to hear.

It is desirable, but not imperative, that the elder or high priest use the name of the child in the prayer of blessing. In some nations this blessing is also referred to as the naming service or christening.

Although this significant sacrament should be performed in a public service, circumstances and conditions sometimes make that impossible. In such cases, it may be performed elsewhere, though still with the same reverence.

## **Arranging the Service**

The blessing of a child can be an important worship experience for the family and friends of the child as well as the congregation. Careful attention to the details of the service is warranted because it is such a special service and can be tailored to the family and the child. Arrangement of the service usually includes the following:

- Appropriate hymns and vocal music
- Selected readings focused on the sacrament: dramatic or responsive readings
- Short opening and closing prayers
- Appropriate scripture readings and explanation of the purpose of the sacrament
- Highlights about the child and family might be included
- A message to the parents and family, impressing upon them their responsibilities, and a challenge to the congregation to help nurture the child and share in the responsibility of the parents and family

- Involvement of many of the family members as desired
- The bringing of the child to the front of the congregation by the parent(s) or guardian as well as the family and the pronouncement of blessing by the elder or high priest

It is not a good idea to combine the children's blessing with other sacraments. This is a special day and needs to be recognized as such by all involved.

## **Follow-up Ministry**

After the blessing, the congregation will want the opportunity to greet the family personally and become further acquainted with the child. Sometimes there is a reception after the service. Continuing contact with the nurturing family is usually welcomed. This is a great opportunity to get the family involved in the life of the congregation.

A report of the blessing should be made by the congregational recorder for entry in World Church membership records, even if the family is not enrolled locally. A blessing certificate could be given to the parents. This certificate can be purchased through Herald House (1-800-767-8181).

The children's blessing is a wonderful way of getting friends of the church involved in the life of the congregation. Some congregations give the family of the child to be blessed fifteen to twenty invitations to send to their family and friends. When new people arrive, the congregation is friendly and welcomes them with the gift of hospitality.

## **Notes**

1. Peter A. Judd, *The Sacraments: An Exploration into Their Meaning and Practice in the RLDS Church* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1992), 87.
2. See also World Conference Resolution 701.

## **Chapter 23**

# **Ordination**

### **Significance**

Ordination is a sacrament of the church. It symbolizes the outstretched hands of God conferring power and authority to represent both God and the church. It implies acceptance of the responsibility to be a servant and to become a leader in holiness and in all good works. Ordination is always a publicly celebrated sacrament because of the mutual commitment to ministry and support given by the one being ordained and the community that is willing to accept and support the ministry offered.

### **Ordination Approvals**

The person to be ordained must have been called of God, and the call must have been approved by the proper authorities of the church. Those called within congregations must be approved by the vote of the congregational conference (see Doctrine and Covenants 17:16, 47:4, 125:14). Calls to the office of high priest, seventy, bishop, and evangelist are approved by a mission center conference or a World Conference.

### **Preordination Training**

Preordination classes are offered to those who will be ordained. In these classes the candidates are introduced to some of the fundamentals of ministry, such as the duties of the various offices, use of scriptures in ministry, and fundamental concepts of the church. The classes are for orientation so that priesthood members may begin their ministry with a clearer picture of what they are called to do.

## **The Act of Ordination**

Ordination is by the laying on of hands (see Numbers 27:18–20; Acts 13:1–3; D. and C. 55:1c, 117:3). The candidate should be seated facing the congregation. The officiating ministers should rest their hands lightly on the ordinand's head.

Members of the Melchisedec priesthood may ordain elders, priests, teachers, and deacons. When occasion requires, an Aaronic priest may ordain priests, teachers, or deacons. A teacher or deacon may not ordain (D. and C. 17:8b, 10a–c). Usually two members of the priesthood participate, one acting as spokesperson.

The officiating minister and the candidate should be informed sufficiently in advance of the actual ordination to allow adequate time and opportunity for spiritual preparation. Seating arrangements and the movements of those who are to ordain and to be ordained should be determined before the service begins.

## **The Nature of the Prayer of Ordination**

Because the object is to confer authority, the prayer should so indicate. It should be specific but well arranged or worded, clear, and easily understood by all present. The ordination prayer is just that, a prayer, and should not become an opportunity to counsel the individual or prophesy. The ordination prayer calls on God to bless the one being ordained and to empower him or her in ministry and witness. Repetitions and set phrases should be avoided; simple language should be used.

## **Arranging the Ordination Service**

The ordination should be performed in a service in which the order of worship emphasizes the significance of ordination as a call to service. Ministry is response to human needs. The order of service should be planned and conducted in this spirit.

The service may be opened with a call to worship or an appropriate hymn and prayer. The ministry of music and scripture reading are appropriate, and a sermon or charge concerning the responsibilities and opportunities relating to priesthood is desirable.

The minister in charge of the service should have in hand a list of the names of those to be ordained and the office to which each is called. The name of each ordinand and the office, together with the names of those who are to ordain, may be announced as each is ordained.

Appropriate hymns or special music may be interspersed in the service as wisdom directs. The service might end with an inspiring hymn followed by the benediction.

### **Follow-up Ministry**

The officiating priesthood member is required to make a statistical report promptly following the ordination and should check later to be certain the newly ordained minister has received a certificate of ordination from World Church headquarters.

The newly ordained member should be given help, encouragement, and guidance in the new work. It is often helpful to assign an experienced member of the priesthood to serve as a mentor for the newly ordained minister. The new minister should be accepted as a member of the priesthood and granted respect and cooperation. A copy of *The Priesthood Manual* makes an ideal gift from the congregation to the first-time ordinand.



## Chapter 24

# The Evangelist's Blessing

### Origin and Purpose of the Evangelist's Blessing<sup>1</sup>

The sacrament of the evangelist's blessing serves as a vehicle for God to affirm, support, and give guidance at specific junctures in the life of a person, family, or congregation. There are no age,<sup>2</sup> race, gender, membership, or life conditions to restrict sharing in this sacrament.

Initially practiced as a singular experience in the life of an individual, the rite emerged in our faith movement from the church's belief in the antiquity of the gospel. It finds its antecedent in the blessing given by God to Abraham and the blessings of Isaac to his sons Esau and Jacob. Although Esau and Jacob's blessings swirled around the principle of birthright,<sup>3</sup> the heart of such fatherly blessings was the passing on of faith. Philip Birnbaum in *A Book of Jewish Concepts*, noted that "[Abraham] established the worship of God in his family and passed on his faith to his son, Isaac, who in turn passed it on to his son Jacob, who bequeathed it to his twelve sons, whose descendants preserved it in Egypt until the days of Moses."<sup>4</sup>

Evangelist's blessings began in our church following the ordination of Joseph Smith's father to the office of patriarch (in 1833), whose primary focus was the bestowal of fatherly blessings on the lives of the faithful. After the opening of priesthood offices to women in 1984 (see Doctrine and Covenants Section 156), the name of this sacrament was subsequently changed from "patriarchal blessing" to "evangelist's blessing."

## The Sacrament of Evangelist's Blessing for Individuals

The evangelist's blessing combines the ministry of human touch (the laying on of hands) with spoken words that affirm God's link with the current events in one's life journey and a conscious decision to strengthen one's covenant relationship with God. The sacrament brings encouragement for the enhancement of gifts and talents, the assurance of one's value, the sense of security and trust in God's continuing presence, and the nurturing confidence to respond to the Spirit in new opportunities of service. It is a defining experience to help people know who they are, their value and giftedness, and the purpose and meaning of life. It helps them refocus their life according to the purposes of God and God's call to them.

The chief purpose of the [evangelist's] blessing is to give comfort, admonition, counsel, rededication and reconstruction, and benediction. It is given for the purpose to bring the one so blessed in closer touch with those divine influences which transform the soul and make us more like Christ.... In other words it secures the intelligent, sincere applicant more divine light, knowledge, faith, humility, courage, patience, fortitude, integrity of heart and spiritual strength.<sup>5</sup>

The blessing is a **prophetic experience** but not in the sense that it forecasts a predetermined future. Prophecy or divine utterance is not measured by its ability to foretell but by its capacity to *forth tell*, that is, to reveal truth. Those seeking specific answers to present or future concerns may be disappointed. Roy Cheville addressed this issue accordingly:

Healthy religion does not take choice-making from the members. The [evangelist's] blessing is no escape from decision-making. It is no fortune-telling device to unveil the future. In this light I ask you to look well to your expectancies as you come to [an evangelist] for a benediction. If you expect to shift the responsibility to God for decision-making, you will probably be disappointed. If you come wanting some specific promise of personal achievement, you will likely turn away unsatisfied. If you come

to escape from realities of life, you will not find the haven you hope for. God is not going to do your problem-solving. The [evangelist's] blessing is not going to give us easy answers. It is not intended to predict the itinerary of our lives.... people of quality do not want this kind of thing. Nor does God. He wants disciples of understanding and ability who choose to go along with [God]. The prophetic gift in the blessing does well to give counsel that we may understand ourselves and understand God. The blessing will set forth guidelines for life planning. The actual choosing must be ours.<sup>6</sup>

Preparation for the blessing usually calls for the evangelist and the candidate to meet several times before the ordinance. The sacrament of the evangelist's blessing is not a one-time experience, but may be expressed in the life of a person on several occasions as wisdom and need may dictate. Recording and transcription of blessings are optional.

## **Family Blessings**

The sacrament of evangelist's blessing is available to families as well as individuals and congregations. The blessing serves to enhance relationships within the family unit and to strengthen the spiritual development and potential of each family member. A family that brings to pass new and creative possibilities fulfills God's desires to bless the lives of human beings. There are moments and events in the life of a family when its members need to experience together expressions of God's love and personal concern. Such a sacramental experience might be appropriate when

- a couple is newly married;
- when there are major changes in life directions for the family as a result of a household move, accident, children leaving home, retirement or going into a nursing home, divorce, or death of a family member;
- when families are blended in a new relationship of marriage; or
- when there are unique conditions and needs.

## Congregational Blessings

The sacrament of evangelist's blessing for a congregation serves as a benediction of empowerment. God's blessing is pronounced on the desires of the people to focus more clearly on the congregation's current needs, call to service, and the direction that it should move in the future. The blessing bestows God's sustaining grace to strengthen the faith of the congregation on its path of discipleship through

- increasing the bonds of love and commitment to Christ and to one another;
- reinforcing the faith of each one in a trusting relationship with God;
- providing a safe environment for reconciliation and the healing brought by God's spirit;
- providing an avenue for individuals to grow in personal and corporate relationship with God;
- helping the congregation discover its particular missional call in its community. This may entail assessing past and present ministries to discern a particular ministerial focus that can become the congregation's major role in community life. Congregational consultants can work in concert with the local leaders and a team of evangelists to assist the congregation in setting goals and objectives; and
- meeting a unique and/or pressing need of a congregation. A congregational blessing need not be exclusively identified with empowering missional objectives. The blessing may focus exclusively on a specific element of the path of the disciple—*community, sharing, learning, spirituality, peace and justice initiatives, and reconciliation*. For example, a congregation may suffer from broken relationships and request a blessing centered in reconciliation and healing of the spirit. This may entail evangelists and congregational leaders working in concert with trained conflict-resolution ministers.

A congregational blessing demands time, energy, and personal preparation, which may include the following:

- Priesthood/leadership team meetings
- Congregational analysis (unique history and program/ministry assessment)
- Gifts and talents assessment
- Visiting team program
- Church school classes (educating people on the purpose and reason for the blessing)
- Information and promotional letters sent to the congregation
- Planning worship services leading up to the blessing
- Planned periods of fasting and prayer
- Family activities—such as family and congregational history sharing

The evangelist's blessing (individual, family, congregational) serves to nurture spiritual growth and equip people for servant ministry. Like all sacraments, this unique ordinance seeks to strengthen faith and enliven God's gift of love and abundant life in the hearts and souls of all God's children.

## Notes

1. Considerable material for this chapter was drawn from three publications produced under the direction of Everett Graffeo when he served the church as its presiding evangelist: Temple School course PA222 *Evangelists: Sharing a New World of Blessing*; a tract, *Blessings*; and a workbook, *A Family Life Blessing*.
2. Although there is no strict age requirement (as in the case of baptism, for example), maturity and understanding of the ordinance is paramount. Traditionally, the evangelist's blessing is given to those fifteen years of age or older.
3. Birthright is defined as a "right, privilege, or possession to which a person, especially the firstborn son, was entitled by birth in Bible times. In Israel, as in the rest of the ancient world, the firstborn son enjoyed a favored position. His birthright included a double portion of his father's assets upon his death (Deut. 21:17). Part of the firstborn's benefits also were a special blessing from the father (Gen. 27:27) and the privilege of leadership of the family (Gen. 43:33). *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. F. Bruce (Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, 1997). Although linked to the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) practice of a parental "spiritual" blessing, the Community of Christ sees blessings as *everyone's* birthright, and so the sacrament of evangelist's blessing is not restricted to church members.
4. *A Book of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company,

- 1964), 4–5; as quoted in Reed M. Holmes, ed., *The Patriarchs* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1978), 20.
5. Alfred H. Yale and Charles E. Brockway, *Ordinances and Sacraments of the Church* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1962), 148–152. Note that the term “evangelist’s” is substituted for “patriarchal” in the original.
  6. Roy Cheville, as quoted by Yale and Brockway, 152–153. Once again, “evangelist’s” is substituted for the original “patriarchal.”

## Chapter 25

# The Sacrament of Marriage

### Marriage in the Community of Christ

All major faith traditions consider marriage to be holy, and the Community of Christ is no exception. In the beginning days of our movement, Joseph Smith Jr. shared inspired counsel declaring, “Marriage is ordained of God” (Doctrine and Covenants 49:3a). Marriage has been held as sacred, and the wedding ceremony is featured as one of the important sacramental rites of the church.

The basic procedures governing performance of the marriage ceremony in the church were set out in a document approved unanimously by a General Assembly meeting on August 17, 1835, in Kirtland, Ohio. This document, now known as Section 111 of the Doctrine and Covenants, has appeared in every printing of the book by the church since the first edition of 1835. Procedures outlined in this document continue to serve as the basis for marriage in the church. The basic understandings and provisions of this document are as follows:

1. The church recognizes that marriage is subject to legal provisions established by various nations and states. This aspect of marriage makes it unique among the sacraments of the church.

2. Marriages within the church are to be solemnized in a public meeting of some kind. This usually occurs in the context of a service of worship.

3. Marriages within the church are performed by members of the Melchisedec priesthood or by Aaronic priests.

4. The church recognizes the marriages of people who choose to be married by authorities outside the church. This may be by civil authorities or ministers of other faiths. Recog-

dition of this kind is based on the understanding that marriage is regulated by provisions of the state as described above.

5. “We believe that it is not right to prohibit members of this church from marrying out of the church, if it be their determination so to do, but such persons will be considered weak in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (D. and C. 111:1d). The phrase “marrying out of the church” has been interpreted to refer to marriage by other authorities as indicated above. This is the logical interpretation when seen in the context of the verses preceding paragraph 1d. Another interpretation, however, is that it refers to marriage between a member of this church and a person who is not a member.<sup>1</sup>

In the past members were frequently discouraged from marrying nonmembers because of the high probability that they would cease active participation in the church. On the other hand, many members are successful in bringing their nonmember spouses into active participation in the church and even into membership. In a world that now provides for multiple interactions with people from other world religions, Christian denominations, spiritual traditions, and philosophies, it is essential that the role of religion be considered carefully before marriage. Multi-faith families can be a source of enrichment and spiritual development, or they can weaken the faith of one or both partners, or the children. The minister can help create an environment of openness and respect, as well as honest consideration of potential conflicts due to differences in faith tradition.

6. Certain procedures within the marriage ceremony itself are prescribed. Specifically, the minister shall say, calling the man and woman by name, “You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?” (D. and C. 111:2a–b). When they have answered affirmatively, the minister pronounces them “husband and wife” in the name of Christ and by authority of the state or province. An additional benedictory statement is often added as follows: “May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen.”

7. A record of each marriage is kept at church headquarters and also by the local recorder.

8. “All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled” (D. and C. 111:4a). This again relates to the legal dimensions of marriage referred to in paragraphs 1 and 4.

9. Monogamy is the only form of marriage endorsed by the church, and polygamy is denounced.

10. Individuals whose spouses have died are free to remarry. Remarriage in cases of divorce is not dealt with in Doctrine and Covenants 111 and will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **The Meaning of Marriage**

Marriage within the church is considered to be a sacrament. The following understandings establish its sacramental character:

1. The act and state of marriage have their origins in the scriptures as being instituted by God. In Genesis 2:18 we read, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”<sup>2</sup> and “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; see also Genesis 2:30 IV). The basic statement in the Doctrine and Covenants is as follows:

Whoso forbiddeth to marry, is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man; wherefore it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.—D. and C. 49:3a–c

2. Not only is God seen as endorsing marriage in principle; divine action is also evident in each specific union of two persons in the marriage ceremony. After vows have been exchanged, the minister “shall pronounce them ‘husband and wife’ in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (D. and C. 111:2c). In the Bible Jesus is recorded as saying in connection with

marriage and divorce, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:6).<sup>3</sup> In the marriage ceremony, the minister acts on behalf of God in joining together a man and a woman.

3. Marriage is a covenant made between two individuals in the presence of God and with the church as witness. The words, “You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion...” (D. and C. 111:2b), indicate the nature of the marriage covenant. It is a commitment to companionship, mutual support, shared responsibility, and love toward each other. The marriage covenant has as its ideal the depth and integrity that characterize God’s covenant relationship with humanity. The sacramental nature of the marriage covenant derives from its relationship to God’s covenant with humankind. And in marriage two individuals embark on a covenant relationship in which they commit themselves to express their best understanding of the demands of Christian discipleship.

Marriage in the church is considered a lifelong commitment as indicated by the phrase “during your lives” (D. and C. 111:2b), which is required as a part of each wedding ceremony in the church. Before Joseph Smith’s death in 1844 speculation regarding the eternal nature of marriage was present within the church. Suffice it to say that the Reorganization always rejected the view that marriage covenants are valid after death. One might suppose that speculation about eternal marriage is based in part at least on Jesus’ statements that “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” (see Matthew 16:19 and 18:18) and “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matthew 22:30).<sup>4</sup>

Additional emphasis in the church’s understanding of marriage can be identified as follows:

4. The marriage relationship is unique. Part of the marriage vow reads as follows: “Keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives” (D. and C. 111:2b; see also 42:7d). This statement suggests that spouses enjoy a depth of relationship with and commitment to each other that surpasses that in their relationships with other individuals. Even though this phrase has usually been interpreted as pro-

hibiting extramarital sexual relationships, it is broader than that. It suggests that spouses hold each other's interests and welfare uppermost when they make decisions regarding the use of their time, money, and other resources. Extremely flexible interpretations of the statement run the risk of violating the spirit of the marriage relationship. However, extremely literal interpretations run the same risk. A view of marriage that denies spouses the opportunity for interaction with other people stunts their growth as individuals seeking fulfillment in all aspects of their lives.

5. The church has always stood adamantly opposed to adultery. In the same spirit as the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:13–15), modern-day scripture admonishes the church, “Thou shalt not steal; neither commit adultery, nor kill, nor do anything like unto it” (D. and C. 59:2c). Adultery is seen as a flagrant violation of the marriage covenant.

6. The church authorizes remarriage by church authorities following divorce in certain circumstances. Over the years, as the incidence of divorce in society has become more frequent and the grounds for it broader, the church has responded by extending remarriage privileges to a wider range of people.

## **Marriage and Termination of Marriage**

The 1984 World Conference took an action that altered the church's official administrative policy on marriage and termination of marriage (WCR 1182). The current position of the church is as follows:

1182. Whereas, The church affirms that marriage is ordained of God (Doctrine and Covenants 49:3a; 150:10; Genesis 2:27–30); and

Whereas, “Monogamy is the basic principle on which Christian married life is built” (Doctrine and Covenants 150:10a); and

Whereas, The church believes that God intends that husband and wife remain married to each other for as long as they both shall live (Doctrine and Covenants 111:2b, 4b); and

Whereas, The church encourages persons contemplating marriage to obtain premarital instruction and make adequate preparation (WCR 972); and

Whereas, Voluntary termination of marriage has become an increasingly common occurrence in many cultures; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the church reaffirms marriage as an institution, a covenant, a sacrament ordained of God, and a legal contract; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the church supports the following principles for guidance to all persons:

1. Marriage is a vital institution in all cultures of the world. It helps provide opportunities for healthy, constructive development of persons. Monogamous marriage provides a setting for a relationship of enduring love and mutual companionship, thus nurturing a social environment in which the couple support and strengthen each other as persons of worth.

2. Marriage is a sacred covenant between husband and wife in which God participates with sanction, blessing, and guidance. The church is committed to providing premarital preparation and other caring ministries to strengthen and nurture faithful marriage relationships.

3. Marriage is sacred when it expresses the nature of God through the relationship of husband and wife. The marriage ceremony, when performed by the authority of the church, is intended to be a solemnization and public witness of the covenanting couple with God, and is thus considered a sacrament. The marriage partners, the officiating minister, and all others participating in the ceremony should approach it with mature consideration and adequate preparation. They should expect that God will bless them in the fulfillment of their various responsibilities.

4. The church upholds the validity of a legal marriage authorized by civil and religious authorities and affirms the potential for sacred relationships which can result. However, the church recognizes that authorized ceremonies, whether in the church or by other authorities, do not guarantee the development of a sacramental relationship. In a marriage where the sacred aspect of covenant is felt to be lacking, the couple are encouraged to resolve before God to strengthen their relationship. The preparation, the ceremony, and the continuing marriage can testify of the sacredness of the marriage covenant.

5. As a legal contract, marriage imparts to both parties certain legal rights and duties which are generally enforceable in the various states and nations of the world. In addition to legal enforceability, such rights and duties impose ethical and moral responsibilities on the parties. This contractual nature of marriage is an important consideration prior to and throughout the marriage relationship.

6. The church recognizes that in some cases either or both partners may have legal and/or moral grounds for termination of the marriage. Termination of marriage by divorce or other legal dissolution formalizes the termination of the marriage covenant. The church affirms that its primary function in these situations is to provide ministry rather than to render judgment. It should respond in the spirit of Christian caring to the needs of persons for support and understanding. The church should facilitate and mediate a ministry of healing to persons as they explore all avenues for reasonable reconciliation. If either or both partners decide to terminate the marriage, the church should continue to provide caring ministry for all persons involved.

7. In cases of the termination of marriage where priesthood status or possibility of charges related to unchristian conduct are involved, the church has a legitimate concern in conducting a review of the circumstances. In these cases, special attention of the administrative officers of the church will be required with healing and reconciling ministry as the primary goals.

8. The remarriage of a person whose previous marriage has been terminated should be approached with the same careful consideration and preparation as that appropriate for every marriage. In cases where the previous marriage was terminated by legal action the officiating minister should insure that marital preparation will include an exploration of the factors that characterized the marital history; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this resolution supersedes WCR 1034.

On November 1, 1985, the First Presidency released to administrative officers a new procedural statement in response to the implications of this resolution. One major policy change is that divorce reports are no longer required to be filed with

the First Presidency, although statistical reports should be made to the Office of Membership Records. The officiating minister and the pastor(s) of the couple desiring to be married are responsible for exploring the circumstances of the divorce and determining whether marriage by church authority can be approved. As indicated elsewhere in this edition of *The Priesthood Manual*, this ministry should be performed in a sensitive and redemptive manner.

## **Lifetime Pastoral Care**

Once the couple is married, the minister should not underestimate the importance and opportunity for taking the initiative to visit. Do not wait until problems occur before contacting the couple. Ministry may be greatly hampered if priesthood members stay away until they receive a call for help. Establishing a genuine relationship provides opportunity for the couple to share with the minister, who becomes their friend.

Sharing the best of times is at the heart of pastoral care, which is a responsibility of the priesthood and the pastoral unit. One definition of pastoral care is, “The mutual concern of Christians for each other and for those in the world for whom Christ died.”<sup>5</sup> Mutual concern cannot be effectively expressed without close, continuing communication between the minister and the couple. Ideally a minister should begin visiting newlyweds in their newly established home and continue to share and be informed about the important events of their lives. Birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, and all kinds of achievements should be a part of their continuing interaction. Many contacts will be brief and informal, including phone calls and casual greetings at church. The couple needs to know that what happens to them is important to the minister.

Through the years the minister should have a rather accurate perception of the condition of the marriage. A friend will always know about the quality of the relationship between the couple. It is significant to remember that pastoral care symbolizes God’s concern for them and their marriage. Although the couple may mention it infrequently or never, they are aware that the minister by virtue of ordination and role is a servant of God. Several influences may occur. One is the expectation

that the couple will live out their lives loving and caring for each other, called to be the best that they can be. Another is a reminder of the grace of God, who promises forgiveness when we need and seek it and gives us the opportunity to begin again. Intrinsic to this is the good news of the gospel expressed through Jesus Christ.

The experience of pastoral care can be rich for the couple and the minister. They affirm each other's worth and develop in experience and understanding. Each will remember and value the best of times they share. Being able to share concerns may prevent stress situations from developing into more serious problems.

## **Crisis**

Accidents, illness, loss of employment, or death of a loved one may become crises for a married couple. The minister must be alert to such occurrences in the lives of those people with whom he or she is involved in pastoral care.

When something occurs in the life of a couple with which they have difficulty coping through their normal problem-solving methods, they may rather quickly be in the midst of a crisis. The minister who knows people well and maintains regular contact with them should recognize symptoms of stress that are greater than normal. Such symptoms as depression, anxiety, severe or continual headaches, or even a bleeding ulcer may indicate crises that grow out of life adjustments such as leaving home, adjusting to a new marriage, or pregnancy.

Loss of a job or savings, unexpected illness, or a natural disaster such as fire or a flood are more quickly identified as crises. The rapid onslaught of such events may overwhelm a couple so that they are unable to cope with the immediate situation. They may panic, be defeated, or resort to ineffective behavior.

On learning of a crisis the minister may take the initiative and intervene. The minister should begin by making contact with the person or couple in the crisis, boil the problem down to its essentials, and help the person or couple to do what needs to be done immediately to relieve the stress of the situation. The one in a ministerial role must take the immediate, practi-

cal steps possible to help the couple cope with the crisis situation. Once the critical danger is past, there is time to review what has occurred and how the couple were able, with help, to cope. “Being with and working through” is the essential task of the minister in crisis events.

Sometimes a minister will be contacted to help people he or she barely knows; a minister must begin by establishing a relationship. This is much more difficult and tenuous than with people with whom there are years of pastoral care as a foundation for trust and confidence. If a crisis is complex and extends over a period of time, the minister can be a bridge with others in the pastoral unit—helping to provide a support group.

Good judgment, confidentiality, and discretion are qualities that should be developed and used by a minister. Broad pastoral care and crisis intervention are two of the strongest needs for marriage-mentoring by the self-sustaining minister. Those who have clinical training are best prepared to engage in therapeutic counseling with a couple who are having problems with their marriage. Priesthood members should have a realistic understanding of their qualifications and limitations. It is best for ministers without clinical counseling training to make referrals to qualified people. Information of a personal nature should be recognized and kept confidential.

## Referral

Some knowledge of local referral agencies will be particularly helpful in crisis situations. Look up information on such referral sources as the following:

- **Health:** Medical and dental personnel; hospitals and clinics; public health services; volunteer health organizations; mental health facilities; Alcoholics Anonymous or similar Twelve Step organizations.
- **Social Services:** Public assistance; children’s services; programs for the disabled; senior citizens; voluntary organizations; church-sponsored programs.
- **Legal Services:** Consumer protection groups; legal aid societies; public defender offices; juvenile court; law enforcement agencies.

- **Employment Services:** Employment agencies (public and private); job-training programs; institutional placement offices.
- **Educational Programs:** Adult education programs; junior colleges, colleges, and universities; trade and technical schools; business schools; local schools—special programs.

It is far better to have some knowledge and even previous contact with referral agencies not commonly used. Refer those who can be helped more effectively by someone else. This will include those who need medical or institutional care, those whose needs are obviously beyond your available time or training, those who need intensive psychotherapy or who are severely depressed and/or suicidal, those with severe chronic financial needs.

Effective referral must be handled carefully so the person or couple will not feel rejected or abandoned. Mention the possibility of referral as early as possible, indicating why specialized help may be needed. Try to communicate that your concern and care as a minister will continue undiminished after the referral. Help them to work through their feelings about referral so they will be open to the professional help they need. Allow them to make their own appointment. Follow up with continuing pastoral care, giving encouragement and support. A successful referral can be rewarding to the couple and the minister.

## Notes

1. See F. H. Edwards, *A New Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1977), 397–398.
2. The Inspired Version equivalent reads, “And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten, that it was not good that the man should be alone; wherefore I will make an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:23–24 IV).
3. See also Mark 10:9 (10:7 IV).
4. Matthew 22:29 IV; see also Mark 12:25 (12:29 IV) and Luke 20:35.
5. C. W. Brister, *Pastoral Care in the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).



## **Chapter 26**

# **Marriage Preparation and Planning**

### **Introduction**

A couple calls. They are engaged. The date is set. They are very happy and want you to share in their joy. Couples often invest a major portion of time, over a several-month period, planning an event that lasts just one day. And yet many times, their call to the minister is an afterthought. All the events and activity surrounding a wedding can be planned in minute detail, yet the wedding service itself is left to the minister. Jointly planning the wedding with a couple and developing a premarital mentoring relationship can establish a foundation for communication and mutual decision-making for the marriage relationship.

Marriage is one of the sacramental expressions of the body of Christ. Marriage symbolizes the intimate sharing of two lives. This sharing shouldn't diminish but enhance the individuality of each person, as both grow in understanding of each other and of God's presence in life. Coming to value the worth of another, opening avenues of trust and mutual nurturing, and practicing the disciplines of forgiveness and reconciliation solidify an enduring marriage.

Marriage as a loving, enduring relationship is important to the couple, their family, the church, and the community. Through the relationship within a marriage, a person can feel affirmed, encouraged, supported, and loved. Marriage in every culture is intended to provide an environment of safety and nurture. Love is one of the greatest things that can happen to us in life. The central part of love provides great joy and op-

portunity for real friendship in the day-to-day companionship of a couple. Intimacy is not something that can be achieved in a short time. Real understanding of one another's feelings only develops fully with years of intimacy. This wonderful knowledge of another person grows out of caring for the other so much that there is a desire to want to understand as completely as possible what the other is feeling.

A good and balanced relationship is one in which neither person is overpowered or absorbed by the other. Every person brings unique gifts and talents to the marriage covenant. As a minister, it is important to help couples understand the difference in giving of one's self in love, but not giving one's self away. Growing together means fostering and nurturing the unique strengths of the other, while at the same time continuing to develop and mature in one's own personhood.

## **Premarital Preparation**

The minister should have sessions with the couple several times before the marriage ceremony. The purpose of the sessions is to help foster a healthy, happy marriage and to provide an opportunity to assist the couple who may appear to be unwisely entering into a marriage relationship to analyze their particular situation further. Attention may also be given to exploring some of the following areas of married life:

1. Different family backgrounds
2. Relationship of the role of the woman and the man in the home (How will the couple relate in order to fill expected and unexpected roles?)
3. Use of time and developing a routine
4. Vocation of both marriage partners (What are future plans?)
5. Finance and money management
6. Relationship to parents and parents-in-law or children of a previous marriage
7. Religious differences
8. Birth of children and parenting
9. Family medical care
10. Marriage and the law
11. Human sexuality, including sex education

Most ministers in the church are unlikely to be qualified to assist couples in all the matters listed above. Therefore it is extremely important that the minister assist the couple to find qualified counselors or resources that can help them think through these major life concerns.

Post-wedding sessions can also be a most helpful aid for the couple. Extreme caution should be taken not to hurry into the marriage ceremony without adequate preparation. If at all possible, the minister should resist “quickie” marriages or other time pressures that may inhibit the possibility of marital success for the couple.

## **Ministering and Mentoring**

When couples contact a minister to officiate at the wedding, it provides an opportunity for worship service planning and premarital planning. Help the couple to think past the wedding. In a few sessions, the minister can offer valuable insight as couples consider what marriage is really like; how well they really know one another; what “baggage” they may be bringing into the relationship; how compatible they are together; and how to consistently invest in something that matters—their marriage.

Encourage the couple to engage in a pre-marriage mentoring process. This may be with you or with a couple you recommend. This is a learning process, a relational connection with others who share their experience and insight. A mentoring couple can provide nurture, accountability, and a valued friendship. Additionally, such a process might provide an inventory assessment, indicating where growth is needed in the relationship.

Topics for discussion during mentoring sessions include those listed above. As a minister, it is important to share in these conversations as a friend and confidant, not a judge or teacher. Learning to talk through difficult issues in the presence of one who guides and affirms, can provide skills for life. For more information on premarital mentoring, *Couples Who Care*, published by Herald House, is an excellent resource.

## **The Wedding Ceremony**

Men and women who love one another are encouraged and supported by the church in confirming their commitment to each other by celebrating their covenant in a ceremony of celebration and worship. Often the minister performing the ceremony knows one or both members of the couple planning marriage. The minister may also be a member of the family of the bride or groom. Such relationships should enhance, not hinder, the mentoring and ministering process.

The wedding ceremony is unique in that it has elements of both a religious nature and a civil nature. Marriage in most cultures is a legal commitment as well as a religious covenant. Ministers, if they have not already, will want to contact local civil authorities regarding proper registration for performing weddings. In North America this is most often the county recorder or clerk's office. Registration gives the minister legal and civil authority, and he or she is responsible for ensuring that the ceremony meets the legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which the wedding takes place. Officiating should conform to the legal requirements and the minister will need to ensure that the marriage certificates and legal records are signed and properly witnessed. These documents then need to be returned to the appropriate government authorities.

Ministers engaged in wedding planning with a couple can provide a sound theological, relational, and cultural foundation for the couple and the marriage. In our society today the minister is one of the few people in the helping services who can take the initiative. Guiding a couple through the ceremony is an opportunity for sharing thoughtful commentary on the sacramental aspects of marriage and the intentional way that a couple can acknowledge the promise and presence of God in their lives by the choice of words and music in the ceremony. Cultural customs should also be taken into consideration. As ethnically and culturally diverse as our world and church are today, it can be a challenge for the minister to be sensitive to the expectations and traditions that are important to the families of the bride and groom. Many cultural traditions not only are appropriate for incorporation into the marriage ceremony but also can enhance the service of worship and expand the celebratory tone.

## Planning the Wedding Service

All wedding ceremonies are under the supervision of the presiding elder of the congregation where the ceremony is performed, whether it is performed by the presiding elder or by another priesthood member, and whether it takes place in the church building, a home, or another location.

Designing the wedding ceremony is the responsibility of the minister in consultation with the marriage couple. The formality or informality, the size of the wedding party, the social situation, the physical facilities, and the availability of assisting personnel all affect the design to some degree.

The acceptability of special music, the propriety of specific activities within the building, and the use of photographic flash equipment are all under the direction and control of the minister. The service should be deeply religious in character.

At least one, and preferably more, planning sessions should be held with the candidates for marriage. It is during these sessions that specific details of the order of service will be worked out. Usually the couple has preferences as to musicians, music selections, the use of such phrases as “giving the bride,” the nature of the processional and recessional, the selection and instructions to a photographer, etc. Where these preferences can be allowed, they should be. If inappropriate musical selections or activities are suggested, it is at this juncture that differences can be resolved so that all will be satisfied.

When planning wedding services the following suggestions might be helpful:

1. The bride, groom, and officiating minister play important roles in the wedding service, but the congregation is also important and should be active in the service. Congregational hymns, readings, and prayers make this possible. In addition to participation by the whole congregation, representatives of the congregation could be asked to offer prayer, read scripture, or make brief statements.

2. The bride, groom, and minister can benefit from working together on the planning of the wedding service. This provides the engaged couple the opportunity to include certain fa-

vorite scriptures and music in the service and also to compose their own vows if they wish. The minister is able to provide guidance as to what elements would combine to make the occasion dignified and worshipful. No fee should be charged by the minister for weddings. If the couple desires, they may make a gift to help defray some of the extra expenses of the minister, or they may show their appreciation by bestowing an appropriate gift. This, however, should be done completely at the discretion of the couple and should not be solicited.

3. The husband and wife may play different roles in a marriage, but they are equal rather than one being subordinate to the other. Language and actions suggestive of inequality between the marriage partners should be avoided. For example, the inclusion of the injunction to “obey” one’s spouse is no more applicable to the wife than to the husband and is best omitted. After the vows have been exchanged, it is preferable for the minister to pronounce the couple “husband and wife” (see D. and C. 111:2c) rather than “man and wife” and to introduce them to the congregation as “John and Jane Doe” rather than “Mr. and Mrs. John Doe.”

4. Marriage is a relationship between two individuals that creates a joint partnership but also preserves the identity of each spouse. Giving oneself to another in marriage is a commitment to sharing many things in common, but it also includes a recognition that the wife and husband will not—and should never—develop identical interests and capabilities in all things. The statement made by the minister in the wedding service should give attention to both of these dimensions of the relationship. This statement includes remarks directed to the couple and also remarks addressed to the congregation. The statement should be kept fairly brief.

5. Extravagance and luxury are out of place in any service of worship. The wedding service is no exception. Floral arrangements, the dress of the wedding party, and the order of service itself should be dignified, and all tendencies toward excess restrained. A congregation may charge for the use of the building for a wedding, especially if there are exceptional demands on the time of a hired custodian or if neither bride nor groom are members of the congregation. If the building is used

for a reception, a nominal fee often is charged to cover specific costs, and the church's beliefs regarding the use of alcohol and tobacco should be honored.

6. Symbolism is an important aspect of all sacraments. The exchange of rings and the kiss are two acts that symbolize what happens in the wedding ceremony. Other such acts could include the exchange of other gifts, greeting the bride's and groom's parents, the presentation to the couple of a special gift from the congregation, or other significant cultural expressions (such as the *arras* or *laso* common in Hispanic weddings).

## **Elements of the Ceremony Needing Special Attention**

***Printed Order of Worship:*** A printed order of worship may be used. It is of special help when there is congregational singing. If it is used, copies may be placed in the hands of the guests as they are seated.

***The Processional:*** There is no set rule for the processional. Various methods are used successfully. Traditionally the bridegroom enters with the minister and waits in front for the bride. The bride is last in the processional, being escorted on the arm of her father or a close male relative or a friend of the family. Or she may walk down the aisle alone. If the groom escorts the bride himself, the processional can be planned so that the groomsman and the best man escort the matron of honor and the bridesmaid. In this case, the minister stands in front alone or with an assistant. In the less structured ceremony, the bride and groom may be seated with their families and among the congregation, coming forward at the proper juncture of the service.

***The Presentation:*** Traditionally, the father or other family member "gives the bride away." The question is asked by the minister, "Who gives this woman in marriage?" and the father, still standing where he was when the processional had ended, says, "I do," or "Her mother and I." Often there is reluctance toward "giving away" a daughter. The question may be asked, "Who presents this woman for marriage?" The reply would be the same as in the traditional sense. A different ques-

tion, which implies proper attention to parental nurture, may be asked by the minister: “Who has prepared this woman for marriage?” Along this same line, a second question could be put, this time to the parents of the groom, asking, “Who has prepared this man for marriage?”

**Introductory Statement:** As part of the introductory remarks, the minister usually declares by what authority the marriage is performed. This declaration may be quite formal or very simple. It usually states that a proper license has been delivered. Proper diligence should have been exercised before the hour of the wedding ceremony. It is the minister’s duty to see that all legal requirements are met.

**Music:** Music is an important worship resource both in the service and the other events (such as the rehearsal dinner and reception) that are usually held. Couples who take an active interest in the selection of music should be encouraged to work cooperatively with the officiating minister, musicians, and leaders of the congregation hosting the service. Sometimes the officiating minister is contacted concurrently with the music director; other situations require the officiating minister to suggest to the couple that musicians be consulted in the planning stages.

Music used in the worship service should be appropriate for worship. Contemporary popular music, frequently requested by the couple, can often be played at either the rehearsal dinner or during the reception. A wide range of appropriate service music has been published for keyboard (organ or piano), voice, and instruments. Musicians who regularly assist with weddings may be aware of the variety of resources; others may wish to write the Worship Ministries Office (1001 West Walnut, Independence, MO 64050 USA) requesting lists of music suitable for the wedding service. Adequate advance planning is imperative to allow time for the purchase and preparation of music resources.

**Candles:** The use of candles at weddings is traditional. Sometimes they are used solely for decorative effect. Often they are used as part of the symbolism of the ceremony. It is important that this symbolism be in harmony with the doctrine of the church.

Some have used a central white candle to indicate Christ or the church. The couple light individual candles to symbolize their own lives dedicated to Christ or they may light a single candle at the conclusion of the ceremony to indicate that their home is to shine with the light of Christ. Some symbolism used may need to be explained to the congregation.

There are some major precautions about the use of candles that should be observed: (1) If candles are carried by members of the wedding party or if they are used as part of the decoration, there should be adequate clearance around the candles in order to prevent accidental fire. Special care should be taken so that, should the candle burn low or tip, it will not catch anything on fire. Be certain that dresses cannot accidentally brush against a flame. (2) In burning, candles often drip molten wax. When it falls on carpets and woodwork, it is extremely difficult to remove. Beautiful pieces of church furniture can be ruined by dripping candle wax. Clear plastic can be spread beneath the candles to prevent this without destroying the decorative effect and, where it can be done, small plates may be placed beneath them. (3) It is not recommended that young children be permitted to carry candles.

***Seating of Guests:*** Various seating arrangements are used. Sometimes only the immediate family members are given special seating. In these situations friends and family of the bride and the groom are intermixed together as a symbol of the uniting of the couple.

In other more traditional ceremonies the parents of the groom sit in the first pew on the right facing the front. The rest of the family and close friends sit in reserved pews behind. Guests who are friends of the groom are seated on the same side in unreserved seats. The parents of the bride sit in the first pew on the left facing the front, with the rest of their family and close friends in reserved pews behind them. Guests who are friends of the bride are seated on the same side in an unreserved area.

***Ring and Flower Bearers:*** Children old enough to understand the ceremony should be used. The use of ring and flower bearers is a matter of choice.

***The Covenant (Vows):*** There is one question that is required to be used by every minister of the Community of Christ when conducting a wedding ceremony. That question is: “You both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal right belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?” (D. and C. 111:2b). The answer of the bride and groom shall be “yes,” or “we do,” or another appropriate response.

Traditionally there has been a covenant or pledge of love and fidelity that accompanies the placing of the wedding rings. There is no set standard. It can be adjusted to the type of ceremony. In some ceremonies there is but one ring, which the groom places on the finger of the bride. Often there is also a ring for the groom. A wedding ring is not necessary, however, and in some cases it may not be used.

When rings are exchanged, the covenant or covenants may be read by the minister and repeated by the bride or groom, or it is permissible for the bride and groom to compose their own covenants, giving them a sense of spontaneity that the more formal reading lacks. When this is done, however, the content of the covenant should be discussed with the minister before the ceremony.

It may be desired that there be a covenant in the giving and one in the receiving of the ring, the groom saying “[bride’s name], I place this ring on your finger to represent my love for you. I pledge to cherish you, forsaking all others, to be with you as long as we both shall live.”

She may respond with something like, “[bridegroom’s name], I accept this ring as your symbol of love, and I will be reminded of it each time I feel it on my hand. This I do because I love you.”

In a double-ring ceremony, the procedure is repeated, the bride giving the ring and the groom responding.

***Benediction:*** The benediction is as follows: “May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen” (D. and C. 111:2d).

## The Wedding Rehearsal

All members of the wedding party should attend the wedding rehearsal. The rehearsal should be at a time before the wedding, usually the day before, when there will be enough time to work out the details.

Detailed instructions should be given to all those involved in the ceremony. Each usher should know his or her area of responsibility. The musicians should be present. All parts of the ceremony should be rehearsed so the timing can be clear.

Arrangements of the participants in the wedding ceremony vary according to custom, personal likes, and adjustment to the physical facilities. Following are two sample arrangements of participants:



- a. The minister facing the congregation.
- b. and c. The bride and bridegroom respectively.
- d. and e. The maid of honor and best man respectively.
- f. and g. The bridesmaid and groomsman respectively.

**A word of advice:** The bride and groom usually have their backs to the congregation, and the minister will be quite close to the wedding party. As a result, voices may be muffled. Each should speak loudly so that those in the congregation will be able to hear. If there is a public address system, this may be used, but it is best not to make the microphone stands conspicuous. A lapel microphone is preferred.

## Sample Ceremonies

Two brief marriage ceremonies are presented here as examples. They may be altered according to local customs and the desires of the minister and parties concerned. Other suggestions can be found in *The Sacraments* by Peter Judd, avail-

able from Herald House. Other marriage manuals are also available from libraries and bookstores.

## Sample Ceremony A

*Honored Friends:* Into my hands has been delivered a license, issued according to law, which authorizes me to unite in marriage [bridegroom's full name] and [bride's full name]. For this purpose we are now assembled here. [Where a civil ceremony has already been conducted, a simple statement of the purpose of the service, mentioning names of the couple, will suffice.]

*Let us ask the blessing of God.* [brief prayer]

*Address:* Marriage is ordained of God to promote the spiritual, social, and material well-being of the human family and the home. Therefore its obligations should be entered into with deep devotion, unselfish love, and upright purpose, its bonds being assumed in the sight of God with reverence and sober consideration. [The length of the ceremony is decided by the length of this address, which can include further comments as the minister deems appropriate. Usually the first portion of this address can be directed to the congregation and the second part to the bride and bridegroom.]

*To the bridegroom:* Do you take this woman to be your lawful wife, to love, honor, and cherish her both in sickness and in health, whether in prosperity or adversity, and to be virtuous and faithful as long as you live? [Bridegroom answers "I do."]

*To the bride:* Do you take this man to be your lawful husband, to love, honor, and cherish him both in sickness and in health, whether in prosperity or adversity, and to be virtuous and faithful as long as you live? [Bride answers "I do."]

*Marriage pledge:* In token of your mutual purpose to unite in this sacred bond and to faithfully observe its duties, please join your right hands.

Do you both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others as long as you both shall live? [Bridegroom and bride may answer in unison "Yes" or "We do," or answer may be consecutively, first the bridegroom, the bride, "I do."]

*Ring ceremony:* [Ring is handed to minister.] As a token of the endless and pure love that the marriage bond requires of you and of the bride, you may place this ring upon the third finger of her left hand. [Minister hands ring to bridegroom to be placed on the bride's finger. Local customs should be observed regarding the finger or hand on which the ring is placed. If a double-ring ceremony is desired, adapt this instruction for the bride's guidance.]

*Pronouncement by minister:* As you have mutually pledged yourselves to each other in the holy bonds of marriage, as a minister of the gospel and by the authority vested in me by the laws of [the state or province], I now pronounce you husband and wife. [This may be adapted to local custom.] You may now seal your vows with a kiss.

*Benediction:* May God add his blessing and keep you to fulfill your covenant from this day henceforth. [Prayer for divine sanction and grace.]

Each order should be prepared afresh. In this way the ceremony will not become stereotyped but will be meaningful to each couple because it has a part of their own planning in it.

## **Sample Ceremony B**

### *Prelude*

*Welcome:* Officiating minister welcomes family and friends of the couple.

### *Congregational Hymn*

*Processional:* Bride and groom walk in the processional together.

*Meaning of Community:* Officiating minister makes a statement about the importance of family and friends who love the wedding couple. Emphasis is placed on past community nurture and on the couple's need for support in the future.

### *Solo*

*Readings:* Two or three close friends and/or immediate family members read poetry or passages that are meaningful to the couple.

*Meaning of Relationship:* Officiating minister makes a personal statement to the couple about what each brings to the marriage and how these gifts can be magnified as a couple.

*Sharing of Vows:* Minister invites the couple to join hands and asks, “Do you both mutually agree to be each other’s companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other and from all others as long as you both shall live? [Bride and bridegroom then answer “Yes,” “We do,” or a similar response.]

*Support of Community:* At the leading of the officiating minister, various members of the congregation stand in their places to state publicly their love and support for the couple. Persons are best pre-selected for this honor so that proper responses are assured.

*Exchange of Rings:* Personal statements by the bride and groom to each other. These statements can be developed creatively, possibly with the aid of the minister.

*Pronouncement of Minister:* “Whereas you have mutually pledged yourselves to each other in the sacrament of marriage, as a minister of Jesus Christ and by the authority vested in me by the laws of [state or province], I now pronounce you husband and wife.” [This may be adapted to local custom.] “May God add his blessing and keep you to fulfill your covenant from this day henceforth and forever. Amen.”

*Solo*

*Pastoral Prayer:* Officiating minister offers a pastoral prayer on behalf of the couple and the supporting congregation.

*Recessional*

*Congregational Hymn*

*Sending Forth:* Officiating minister states to the congregation, “And now may you go forth in the support and love of [bride and groom]. May the grace and love of God go with you all. Amen.”

## **Chapter 27**

# **Laying on of Hands for the Sick**

### **Background**

Laying on of hands for the sick is a sacrament of the church. It was practiced in the time of Jesus and subsequently in the early, apostolic church (see Mark 16:19; Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8; and James 5:14–15). A prayer of blessing for the sick is mentioned in the Book of Mormon as a practice of the Nephites (see Mormon 4:87; IV Nephi 1:6; and Mosiah 1:98). In modern times we have been commanded to teach and practice the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick (see Doctrine and Covenants 42:12d).

### **Calling the Elders**

This sacrament, often referred to as administration, is performed by elders. The responsibility for calling the elders rests on the one needing or desiring the laying on of hands for the sick. In the case of a child or an individual who is not conscious or competent, this sacrament may then be requested by a relative or a friend. In emergencies it may be performed by one elder, but usually it involves two (D. and C. 42:12d).

### **Preparation**

This sacrament should be celebrated in faith. The essence of that faith was expressed by Jesus when he taught us to pray, “Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10). It is inevitable that both the sick person and those who love him or her hope that God will bring relief from illness and suffering and a restoration

of health. However, the scriptures do not promise that a person will be cured. James wrote regarding this ordinance: “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven” (James 5:15). It will be noted here that the promise is that the “prayer of faith shall save the sick.” This is in harmony with latter-day instruction that reads, “And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for, and lay their hands upon them in my name; and if they die, they shall die unto me, and if they live, they shall live unto me” (D. and C. 42:12d).

These indications from the scriptures point to the fact that God has not promised physical healing, but that if we die, we shall die unto God or if we live, we shall live unto God. All of these promises presuppose that the sick ones, as well as the elders, have come to God in that spirit and with the preparation necessary to yield their lives to God and, in repentance, commit their lives into God’s service. In that spirit the principles of forgiveness, salvation, and commitment are a part of the anticipations of those who participate in this sacrament. The laying on of hands for the sick should be done in an atmosphere of trust in God.

Healing comes in many forms. In some cases, an individual and his or her family may be blessed with a sense of peace and the constant presence of the Holy Spirit as the person moves toward death.

## **The Anointing**

One elder anoints the head of the sick person with only a drop of oil. After anointing, the elder places both hands on the person’s head and offers a prayer inviting God’s presence. It should be brief and be related to the act of anointing.

## **The Prayer of Petition (Confirming the Anointing)**

After the completion of the anointing prayer, the second elder adds his or her hands to the person’s head and offers the prayer of petition for blessing. Often referred to as the prayer of confirmation, it should also be a brief prayer and to

the point. It should present the sick person to God in simple, clear terms and leave him or her in God's hands. The one offering the prayer should avoid either open or veiled promises of healing in the form of relief from symptoms and restoration of perfect health.

Priesthood members called on to offer this sacrament often are so eager for the sick person to be healed that they yield to the impulse to promise recovery. Such a promise should not be a part of the anointing or the prayer of petition. God gives the blessings. We are to present the person to God, who understands the needs of the one who is sick.

Especially in cases when only one elder is available for administration, this sacrament may be preceded by the offering of a prayer by an Aaronic minister or unordained person.

## **Public or Private?**

On most occasions the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick should be performed in a private setting with the person who is ill, the officiating ministers, and possibly a few close friends or family in attendance. From time to time requests are made for this sacrament to be performed in a public setting such as during a Sunday worship service. While there may be times when this is appropriate, the usual practice is for this sacrament to be performed in private. (See also chapter 28, "Visiting the Ill.")

It is often difficult for the person who is ill to fully disclose the nature of the illness and his or her current need in a public setting. Great wisdom should be exercised in dealing with requests for public expression of this sacrament lest it become an opportunity for something other than seeking a blessing from the Divine.

## **The Use of Oil**

Olive oil is traditionally used for anointing the sick. While there is no specific command to consecrate the oil for this purpose, it is the long-established tradition and a reasonable expectation that the oil used should be consecrated.

In the consecration of oil, the regular practice of the church is to have one elder, and sometimes two, consecrate the

oil to be used in anointing. The container is opened or the cap is removed for this blessing. One elder serves as spokesperson, generally asking God to bless the oil for the purpose of anointing the sick. There is no prescribed wording for this prayer. The elder prays briefly and sincerely as seems appropriate. Once a container of oil is consecrated, there is no need to consecrate it again before each use.

Sometimes requests are made to anoint afflicted parts of the body. This is not appropriate and should not be done. The elder should anoint the head only. The anointing is not for medical purposes, but is a symbol of the anointing of the Spirit of God. One drop of oil is sufficient. Oil should not be taken internally. It is not a medicine.

### **Use of the Hands**

Hands should rest lightly on the head. Be careful not to cover the eyes, nose, mouth, or face of the one who is ill. It is easy to be careless at this point, and a sick person may be very distressed by such carelessness.

### **Length of Stay**

Terminate your visit as soon as possible after the prayer of petition is completed. It is much better to make frequent short visits than a single long and tiring one. Do not sandwich this sacrament between periods of small talk or secular conversation. Make it a spiritual experience.

Following the anointing and prayer of petition, when the sick one has been assured that you will continue to remember him or her in your prayers, leave the person to meditate on this recent spiritual experience.

### **Favorite Remedies**

Refrain from advising the ill person to use medicines or remedies that you believe will be beneficial. Doing so may encroach on the function of the physician. The law of the land is strict in its requirement that only doctors give prescriptions. The doctor is the specialist in medicine; the minister functions in relation to the ways of the Spirit.

## **Cleanliness**

The clothing, person, and mind of the elder should be scrupulously clean. To avoid offense, use a toothbrush and a good mouthwash before going to celebrate this sacrament. It is always wise to wash the hands before and after the laying on of hands.

## **Contagious Disease**

In cases of contagious diseases, the elder should use special care to not become a carrier and spread the disease. Where contagion is a factor, permission of the doctor in charge should be obtained before entering the sickroom. Proper precaution should be used afterward.

## **Offering this Sacrament to Nonmembers**

Sharing this sacrament with nonmember friends is certainly permissible and a fine opportunity to give good ministry, provided the nonmember friend has an understanding of our belief and practices.

## **Conclusion**

Laying on of hands for the sick is one of the most comforting and fruitful sacraments of the church, and for that reason it should be highly regarded and used with restraint and understanding.



## Chapter 28

# Visiting the Ill

Illness strikes people of all ages and circumstances. Times of ill health might be indicated by physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual pain. Illness might be a short, treatable experience; a life-long condition; or a situation that is life threatening and terminal. Many experiences, conditions, diseases, and even treatments can cause individuals to become ill or unable to function in some way. Some people will receive treatment and rest at home, while others may find themselves in hospitals, treatment centers, or skilled-nursing homes. Each situation is unique and offers opportunities for ministry. The role of the minister is to offer compassionate support, hope, encouragement, and a listening ear to those who are ill. Prayer or administration may be incorporated into the ministry offered by ordained ministers. (See chapter 27 for an extended discussion of this sacrament.)

Whatever the situation, there are some basic guidelines that might be helpful in considering how to approach and support those who find themselves in the midst of illness. Keeping in mind that illness is broadly defined and that locations of the ill person will vary, these suggestions or guidelines are not specific, but can be applied to most situations.

1. ***Knock before entering.*** This is important whether visiting at a private residence, hospital room, treatment center, or nursing home. Always respect a person's privacy by knocking and listening for an invitation to enter.

2. ***Privacy please.*** Realize that medical staff cannot answer your questions regarding a patient's condition. Regulations prohibit releasing medical information to anyone not listed in the medical record.

3. ***Sit or stand?*** Use good judgment. If the person to be visited is lying in bed, you may stand or pull up a chair if available. Do not sit on their bed. If they are sitting up, whether in bed or in a chair, it is best to visit at their eye level. Place yourself in a position that keeps the person from straining their body to see you.

4. ***Lighting.*** Be aware of lighting in the room. Do not place yourself between the sick person and a light source, whether it be a lamp or window. It is very difficult to see someone with a light source behind them. Do not adjust lighting without permission.

5. ***Listen.*** Be present to the ill person by listening intently and allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings. If the television or radio is on, ask if it is all right to turn it off or turn the volume down while you visit. Avoid responding with clichés or medical advice. The role of the priesthood visitor is to allow the person to talk honestly without feeling judged or guilty about their feelings. Gently remind them of the love and prayers of the congregation as well as God's love and presence with them.

6. ***Touch.*** A gentle touch to the hand, shoulder, or head can be comforting to some, but not all individuals. Be sensitive to their comfort level and the source of their illness so as to avoid increasing their pain.

7. ***Speak clearly.*** Speak in normal tones unless the ill person indicates he or she cannot hear you. Be aware that people who appear to be sleeping, unconscious, or in a coma can often hear. Hearing is generally the last sense to be diminished, even in the dying process. Speak only what you wish the ill person to hear.

8. ***Two by two.*** It is preferable for priesthood members to visit in pairs. However, when this is not feasible, ordained and non-ordained can serve as a pair. When visiting in a private residence, it is wise that someone besides the ill person be present during the visit. This might be a visiting partner, or a family member or friend of the ill person. When visiting alone in a hospital or care center, leave the door partially open.

9. ***Time.*** How long to visit an ill person depends on the circumstances at hand. Sometimes you may sense a brief

visit is in order, particularly in a treatment center or hospital setting. Other times the ill person may indicate the need for someone to just sit with them for an extended period of time. Still other situations may find the ill person wanting to talk and visit extensively. Be sensitive to the surroundings and the needs of the person. Be sensitive to how the person is feeling, and do not linger if you sense they need to rest or prefer to be alone.

10. **Prayer.** Simple prayer can be a comforting and healing experience. Most people appreciate being lifted up in prayer by the visiting minister. It is appropriate to ask the ill person if he or she would like you to offer prayer. However, do not be pushy or assume they would like prayers offered on their behalf.

11. **Administration for the sick or laying on of hands.** In addition to prayer, Melchisedec priesthood members may offer to administer to the ill person. While two Melchisedec members are preferred, if necessary, one Melchisedec priesthood member may provide the administration. If an Aaronic priesthood member or an unordained person of faith is present, this person may offer an opening prayer before the ordinance is administered.

12. **Ministry of Presence.** Ordained ministers represent the living Christ. Christ's ministry was with the people. By being present with those who are experiencing illness, we share the love of Christ. Priesthood members are called to follow the example set before us to be with the people, to be present with them in times of joy as well as times of hardship and trials. The power of presence to comfort and encourage is an important and vital part of the ministry of the priesthood.

Ministry to the ill is an important part of congregational life. Most people will experience times of illness and appreciate the support and encouragement of the priesthood as well as others within the congregational family.



## **Chapter 29**

# **The Funeral Service**

The death of a loved one can be a difficult time for family and friends. Some type of worship experience can be an important part of the grieving experience. The circumstances surrounding the death and the age of the deceased are all important elements that set the tone for this important time of sharing. The funeral is a familiar ritual that helps people to accept the loss as real, and to remember and honor their loved one. In years past there were distinct differences between a “funeral” and a “memorial service.” Today the terms are often used interchangeably as well as other terms such as “remembrance service” or “celebration of life” service. For our purposes we will use the term funeral to refer to any ritual or worship experience held on behalf of the deceased.

### **A Worship Setting**

The funeral service can be a meaningful worship experience/ritual that helps family and friends celebrate and remember the life of their loved one. A funeral is not a sacrament. However, the service can bring a spirit of hope and encouragement to those in attendance. In years past, the funeral was often a sad and bleak experience. Today’s trend is for the funeral to be a time of celebration and remembrance of the life of the deceased, as well as an opportunity to rejoice in God’s redeeming love for both the living and the dead.

Funerals take on many forms and occur at varying times after a death. Some occur days after the death, while others take place weeks or even months later. The family has numerous options available, depending on their needs. Many families

live around the world and cannot always come together right after a death. In these instances, the option to have some type of service at a later date or time is helpful.

When planning for a service at a later date, families may not realize the importance of a worshipful ritual soon after the death to help them find closure in their relationship with the deceased. Because we live in a world that encourages self-reliance and independence, family members may not understand their need to grieve and to be in the presence of others for mutual support. One role of the minister might be to encourage family members living in the area to share together in some type of meaningful ritual soon after the death. This could be a simple and short time of sharing and prayer in the funeral home, church, or one of their homes with the minister providing leadership. This time of sharing would in no way replace the upcoming funeral but would provide some sense of support in the interim.

## **Leadership Role**

The call to officiate at a funeral may come in advance or suddenly without warning. Many elderly people pre-plan their service by selecting the person they would like to officiate, as well as the hymns and special readings. Other times, the family is at a loss as to where to begin in planning a service and will look to the minister and the funeral home for direction.

It is always important to sit down with the immediate family and talk about their wishes. Generally this will involve only the planning of the actual worship experience and/or graveside service. The family will determine where and when the service will be held and will work with the funeral home in preparing the body, determining whether a visitation will be held, if there will be a casket present, if it will be open or closed, or if the body is to be cremated. The role of the minister is to listen to and support the wishes of the family. If the minister is a friend of the deceased or the family, it is generally easier to relate to them during this preparation period. If the minister is not familiar with the deceased or family, it is especially important to listen intently and visit with friends and family to gather insights into the life of the deceased. Personal stories or reflections shared by family and friends can help the minister relate to the family and truly celebrate the life of the departed.

The following topics may be discussed with the family in preparing for the funeral:

- Will there be a visitation? open or closed casket? If a visitation is held, the minister should try to be present as a gesture of love and support to the family.
- Location, time, and date of the service.
- Will there be a procession to the cemetery, and is the family expecting the minister to conduct a brief graveside ceremony?
- Will there be any type of military or fraternal organization involved?
- Who will be responsible for the music and musicians? Will the music be live or recorded? Had the deceased requested any special music? What are the family's wishes in regard to the music? It is important to remember that the music selected may not be the style of music preferred by the minister. The age of the deceased or the culture of the family will be a determiner of the music selected, not the preferences of the minister. Guidance can be given, but the minister's preferences should not be pushed on the family.
- Will the obituary be read or would they prefer that the minister incorporate the information into his or her remarks? This often seems less cold and more comforting. If it is to be read, who will do that?
- Are there favorite scriptures that the deceased or family members would like to have read during the service?
- Are there special stories or remembrances they would like to be included in the minister's brief remarks?
- Will family members be preparing remembrances or thoughts to be spoken or read? Who will read them?
- Would they like to give opportunity to those attending to speak?
- Are there other persons they would like to participate in the service? If so, how?
- Will they be displaying mementos, photos, or other items related to the deceased?
- Depending on the location of the funeral, determine who will take care of setting up sound equipment and other details for the service.

- Talk about the length of time to be dedicated to the service.

## **Organizing the Service**

Each funeral is a unique experience designed to support the family in remembering and honoring their loved one. There are no hard and fast rules as to what should be included within the service or how the order of worship should be designed. Components that might be included in the service include the following:

- Music: Prelude, special music, postlude; live, recorded, or a combination of both
- Reading of the obituary by a family member, friend, or the minister
- No formal reading of the obituary, but the facts to be included in the minister's comments
- Eulogy to be read—a written commentary about the deceased, possibly including highlights or good memories of his or her life
- Prayer: Invocation, benediction, pastoral prayer
- Brief remarks by the minister
- Reading of family remembrances by the minister or another individual
- Opportunity for family members to speak or read their own remembrances
- Opportunity for those in attendance to speak
- Military or fraternal rituals to be included in the service or graveside ceremony

No one service should incorporate all of these components. They are listed to help the minister draw upon when helping families plan a funeral service. Be mindful of the allotted time frame for the service. Do not overplan too many components, particularly when allowing family or others in attendance to share. As the officiating minister, be sensitive to the Spirit and the length of time individuals are allowed to speak. Give guidance and direction, honoring the wishes of the family in regard to the length of the service.

## **The Minister's Message**

The minister's message should bring words of hope and encouragement to family and friends as well as remembrances or anecdotes of the deceased. Personal experiences or stories of the deceased are always appreciated. Some ministers use the obituary as a framework for part of the message, particularly if it is not to be read. The message should be brief and might include scriptures of hope, faith, or love. Brevity is especially important if time is being allowed for family or others in the congregation to share.

There are numerous scriptures, poems, and readings that speak of hope, faith, love, and encouragement that can be used. The following scriptures, in particular, may be appropriate to use within the service or the message: John 11:20–27; I Peter 1:3; Titus 3:7; II Thessalonians 2:16; I Corinthians 13:4–8, 13; John 16:33; Romans 8:38–39; Psalm 23; I John 4:7–10; Alma 3:105 (Book of Mormon).

## **Graveside Service and Committal**

The funeral director can inform the minister as to the logistics of the processional to the cemetery. At the cemetery, the minister generally precedes the casket to the grave and stands at the head of the casket. The graveside service usually consists of a brief scripture reading and benedictory prayer. Some families may wish to drop some flower petals or a bit of earth into the grave whether before or after the benediction.

The minister should greet each of the family members with a hug or a handshake following the service.

## **Reporting**

The officiating minister should ensure that the congregational recorder enters the record of the death into the World Church's membership record database if the deceased was a member of the Community of Christ. The funeral director will take care of other necessary reports to local authorities and registries.

## Follow-up Ministry

The ordained minister's role does not end with the benediction at the funeral. Congregational priesthood members should work together to ensure that the remaining family, friends, and congregation are supported in their grieving. In a fast-paced society, we often forget that grief is a process that cannot be rushed. Neither can it be expected that each person will grieve in the same way. While the stages of grief as defined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (see her book *On Death and Dying*, published originally by Macmillan in 1969) are helpful to understand, they are not to be seen as a linear pattern with a predesignated time frame for each stage. The grief process is personal and cannot always be framed within distinct and recognizable stages of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance.

The community of faith should be a safe place for people to share their grief, to be listened to, and to be loved no matter the form or time frame in which their grief is manifest. Ordained ministers represent the living Christ and are called to follow in his footsteps. That means simply to be with the people as he was. "To be with" might mean to call or e-mail, to visit in person, to listen to, to share a meal, to help with household tasks, or to sit and visit over a cup of tea. Ministry to the bereaved is an important part of congregational life. This ministry of presence can be a meaningful and uplifting experience for people who are hurting. The burden of grief is almost always lightened when shared with a friend.

### A Reading Based on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

Sometimes soon,  
sometimes many moons;  
the heart grows weak,  
and as I walk through  
the Valley of the Shadow  
of Death I am not  
afraid because I know my  
Shepherd is waiting to take  
me to the home I have  
been longing for.  
—author unknown

## Chapter 30

# Home Ministry

### The Role of Home Ministry

Lasting personal care and congregational growth depend on good pastoral care. Effective pastoral care can only take place when we visit the members and friends of the church in their homes.

There are many references in the scriptures directing priesthood members to minister in members' homes. Traditionally, these visits have been made by two priesthood members or by a priesthood member and an unordained person. It is noteworthy how many times the Gospel stories describe Jesus entering a home. The scriptures also record that Jesus sent out the disciples two by two to go to the homes of the people (see Mark 6:7–13). The church accepted this principle and gave home ministry a high priority.

Home ministry is no more the exclusive responsibility of priesthood than are various leadership roles in worship settings in church buildings. But priesthood members have a vital role in directing the visiting ministry and making sure it takes place. With a comprehensive visiting program, all those congregational members who are willing should be included.

In its larger sense the example of Christ and the early disciples helps us to understand that priesthood members should live close to the people, giving ministry and pastoral care in the full range of life's activities. Therefore, priesthood responsibilities should not be confined to the meetings that take place within the walls of the church building. Actually for the ministry within the walls to be meaningful, we have to know what the needs and op-

portunities of our members and friends are. How can we better come to know these needs and opportunities than through visiting in the homes? It is also in the homes that we will often meet the friends of our members. This may provide opportunities to share the good news with them also.

However, in more recent years, the conditions of society have changed in many parts of the world so much that the model of home ministry that worked well in the past is no longer helpful. Many priesthood members have found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with home visiting. With the business of modern life, it is difficult to find a time when all members of the family are together and have time to visit about their spiritual concerns. Modern attitudes have made home visiting more unnatural to family life. Neighbors do not visit each other in many large cities in the way that people formerly visited in rural areas. Changing social circumstances in many places have made home visiting feel artificial and contrived.

It may help to look at ministry in the larger sense and to consider offering pastoral ministry to people in the situations where they live, rather than to try to carry on a certain kind of formalized activity. Often a home visiting program seems artificial both to the ministers and to the families. For better or worse, many of the functions of family ministry have been taken over by peer group ministries in many places today.

The resource, “Home Visiting Made Easy for Your Congregation,” which is a part of the *Congregational Leaders Handbook*, suggests a program in which visiting ministry and coming together in small groups is combined to address some of these changes in society.

## **The Home Is the Basic Unit**

Great changes are taking place in family life throughout the world. Single parents today lead many homes. In some countries, the majority of parents work away from home during the day. Also it should not be surprising that some homes that need priesthood ministry are led by unmarried parents (who may be registered as domestic partners in some countries). The public ministry of the church should recognize that there are different needs in different types of homes and not

seek to develop an approach to pastoral care that emphasizes only one way to visit and share. Some pastoral care will be offered through the church school, youth ministry activities, or some other interest groups. But there are times when ministry needs be more individual and person-centered. Priesthood members must attempt to interpret the gospel at the personal level, and this is one of the great opportunities present when home ministry is done in a sensitive and caring manner.

## **The Purpose and Importance of Visiting Ministry**

The church is called by God to minister to all people as they walk the pathways of their lives. God has placed priesthood in the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Priesthood ministry encompasses the whole range of human experience. It involves family relations, personal concerns, and social life. It is interesting to note that Jesus, in the short time of his ministry, shared with people at a wedding feast, at their work fishing, on the roads and highways, and in their homes. Wherever people lived life, Jesus was there.

Personal ministry can stimulate the life of the family and help its members to grow spiritually. Through visits in the home, members can be invited not only to attend regular church activities but also to plan for those special events where they can participate with the church in its larger gatherings such as conferences, retreats, reunions, and youth and young adult camps. Through family ministry the members may come to understand better the purposes of God in their lives. Visits in the home can help members see how much the church needs them and how much they need the church community. It can guide members in sharing their gifts and resources where the need is most apparent and where they feel most fulfilled as disciples in following Jesus on the path. Our visits can also promote the sharing of our testimonies and stimulate the evangelistic outreach of the family. Through home visiting the initiative can often be taken to unite families within the church community.

Ministry in the home can be educational, reconciling, and inspirational. The church is strengthened as the personal ministries, the sacraments, and the teachings of the church be-

come more relevant to life and increasingly experienced in the lives of those who feel a tie to the Community of Christ.

Ministry in the home often deals with the emotions, habits, and relationships of individuals and it certainly can involve the minister in some very delicate matters. This fact requires that priesthood members be able to keep confidences and be trusted by those whom they visit.

Home ministry can open doors of opportunity for the expression of individual and team talents within the church. One of the surprising things to many people is the amount of latent talent that has never been tapped within any congregation. Often this is due to the fact that many people are timid or have never caught the attention of those who should know about their abilities. Priesthood members who visit in the home can discover these gifts and invite those visited to share their gifts with the congregation.

Most members have the need to become involved in some form of Christian service. This can take many forms within the church program and within the community. Christian service requires involvement in the lives of others in a good way. Those who are not involved should be given the opportunity. The discovery of talents unused or latent can be a positive result of intentional home visiting.

A home visit may in some cases be the only tie between the church and some families. The first symptom of problems within a home or within the congregation may be erratic participation in the congregation's activities. Experience has shown that it is important to reach out quickly to such families or individuals. The longer we wait, the greater the chance they will become totally inactive.

Those involved in home ministry seek to transmit faith, trust, and knowledge. They discover family situations and individual needs that should have the attention of the pastor or other specialized ministers or services. They make available advice, direction, and spiritual guidance to those members separated from the worshipping body of the church. This ministry should be of help to the family in building a true Zion community.

## **Family Relationships Affect the Church**

The strength of the church lies in the spiritual health of its families. This is true because homes are the primary social units of society.

The family with an affirmative attitude toward the church is usually an asset to the church in mission. Such families will participate in church ministries as individuals and will support one another in such participation. They make a financial contribution to the church because they know it serves as an extension of their own concerns for humanity.

## **Family Relationships Affect the Inner Family**

Interpersonal relationships are reflected in the emotional climate of the home. Good relationships and parental attitudes are important if there is to be good communication among family members. Parent-child relationships have much to do with the emotional health of the children. Where there is love and a sharing in the responsibility of tasks within the home, mutual companionship can flourish.

Societies all over the world are changing. The roles of individuals vary. Psychological differences between the sexes, disciplinary techniques used with children, and the understanding of self-image are changing. It takes spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physiological maturity to cope with this change.

Good family relationships tend to condition lives to good living. Harmony in the home, love expressed freely, and respect for individuality should be in every church home. When this does not exist, the home is weakened in its witness before the world, and individuals are deprived of self-identity and security.

Families that worship together find strength, unity, and love that others do not experience. True worship includes the spirit of thankfulness and mutual appreciation.

## **Criteria of Spiritual Health and Outreach**

Because priesthood members are concerned for the spiritual condition of the individual and the family, some criteria

are needed to identify the level of this condition in family life. There may be many more than those enumerated here, but the following areas recently set forth appear to be significant:

1. Involvement in church life is one sign of spiritual well-being. Erratic attendance frequently dwindles to nonattendance. Experience through the years has shown that those who are spiritually healthy desire to come together regularly.

2. Generous financial support of the church is indicative of commitment. Partial or limited support, or support withheld, is indicative of need for ministry. The amount of support must never be compared among families. The criterion rests on the sound principle of discipleship of which the generous sharing of resources is a part.

3. The family or person's sense of well-being is an important factor. This involves physical and mental health, financial security, and general mutual concern for one another. Those who lack adequate food or clothing, whose energies are vitiated by illness, whose self-respect is put down by unemployment, who are abused, or whose ability to relate with the community is impaired by nonsocial or antisocial attitudes often find themselves struggling to go the path of the disciple.

4. Affection and supportive family relationships indicate healthy homes. The interdependence of members of the family should be recognized, along with the personhood of the individual. The fine balance between the two makes for good social adjustment and happiness.

5. An optimistic and hopeful attitude is significant. An affirmative and reasonable attitude toward life is an indication of vitality. Negative attitudes are danger signs. Those who are trained in counseling and psychotherapy tell us that the expressed attitude toward others is a strong clue to the nature of the mind of the individual.

6. The reading literature in the home tells much about it. Every member should be a learner, eager to discover new ways of understanding God and his or her relation to God. The home where the *Herald* and other church publications are read regularly, where the scriptures are read and studied, where church school literature is studied, and where other church publications and course materials are to be found is one where

the ongoing movement of the church has set the pace. Financial factors may limit the amount of such literature, but there should be some there, and it should be used.

7. An evangelistic outreach is to be found in good Christian homes. The ingrown family or the family that confines its social contacts to church members is missing an important part of the Path of the Disciple. The joy of sharing the good news is the heart of evangelism.

Thus, we hope to develop in the home of those associated with the Community of Christ regular church involvement, a generous financial response, a sense of well-being, good family relationships, an affirmative attitude, and active evangelistic outreach.

## **Who Performs Visiting Ministry?**

Visiting ministry can be a significant part of congregational ministry. The fact that there are many offices of priesthood presupposes varying responsibilities. Thus, there are many specialized ministries. A call to a specific office is a call to specialized ministry.

While the Aaronic priesthood may bring public ministry when necessary, its basic responsibility is related to families and individuals. Such ministry is often referred to as the ministry of presence. Visiting ministry is a significant ministry of the Aaronic priesthood. Here ordained ministers take the lead, but unordained members and friends should be included in a congregation's visiting program.

The entire ministry extended by the church in a congregation is under the direction of the pastor; however, in providing pastoral or shepherding ministry all priesthood members should and must be included. The pastor can help priesthood members appreciate the specialized characteristics of their callings and counsel with them in preparing to do their specialized work.

## **Priesthood Preparation for Visiting Ministry**

Priesthood members need to be spiritually ready. The attributes of godliness must be nurtured constantly. A willing-

ness to give of our time is necessary. Openness to spiritual guidance and a sense of justice are needed. A genuine love for people is imperative. Spiritual readiness is a growing thing, never static. It is the quality of the shepherd.

All ordained ministers should know and understand the duties of their calling. They ought to take courses of study related to their office and function. Because home ministry will inevitably bring priesthood members into counseling situations, they should take at least one course in ministerial counseling. It is important, however, that priesthood members not presume to be or represent themselves as professional counselors. They should learn where resource materials and trained personnel may be found and how to use them.

Visiting sharpens the skills of successful home ministry. The whole program should offer “on the job” training and provide “feedback” sessions for the benefit of all.

## **Making the Visit**

Appointments may be made with the family well ahead of the visit. Occasionally people are reluctant to make an appointment, and a brief call sometimes may be made without previous arrangement. Frequently the purpose of these visits is primarily to listen to the member or members. We should also bring some aspect of the program of the church into the home. Other visits may be made in response to a specific need and an office-centered ministry may be brought in such a case.

It is advisable for two members of the priesthood or a priesthood member and another member of the congregation to visit together. Visits by a priest to support spiritual growth, a deacon to assist in the area of a generous stewardship response, or a teacher to discuss participation in the blessings of the congregation could well be enhanced if there were teams of two. Approaching each visit it should be understood which one is to take the lead in the discussion. The general pastoral ministry of watching over the church involves a variety of circumstances in which two people are needed to strengthen and support each other. Some priesthood members also need the training gained by association with those more mature and experienced.

## Reporting

Reporting must be done for a definite purpose, not for the sake of reporting. The true value of ministry is not indicated in a report but in the kind of response the family makes toward the ministry.

The pastor or coordinator of the visiting ministry program ought to encourage each minister to report. Such reporting will help the minister assess the progress of those under his or her care. Further, it presents a better control over the necessary information about families—where they live, new addresses, their needs, and their gifts. Special situations should be reported to the pastor immediately, while routine visits may be reported quarterly or as often as the pastor may determine.

An annual analysis of the program of visiting ministry should be helpful to the pastor, the leadership team, and the priesthood. It can serve as a guide in evaluating what has been done and in determining what improvements should be made for this ministry to be more effective. Mutual encouragement is needed to keep the ministry alive. A careful analysis will determine those members to be visited first and most often. In most situations more than one contact is needed for adequate ministry. The desirability of a quarterly report is a matter that cannot be overemphasized. Every report should be obtained. No quarter should go by without a report from each minister or team. The report should be acknowledged, and the minister or team should be thanked.

## Summary

Visiting in the homes is an important part of the ministry of priesthood members. Perhaps one of the significant understandings that visiting ministry opens is the awareness that calling reaches beyond the activities officially organized by the church such as formal worship, educational activities, and social gatherings. Those in the priesthood are called to be with the people sharing their burdens, joys, and interests. In a sense it is important to guard against being too formal in these ministries. Home ministry may take place within the house where people live, but it may also be attending a game in which a

youth participates, meeting for lunch where a person's concerns can be discussed, or helping someone in a nursing home write a letter.

It will perhaps help to remember that the primary calling of priesthood is to minister to people. The ways such ministry is accomplished may vary. The church is a community, and the nature of such a mutual fellowship indicates that ministers, as shepherds, are to be vitally concerned about the welfare of people and use whatever methods seem most appropriate to meet the needs of each one.



