

God help us to discharge our responsibilities to our youth by making an environment in home, in school, in church, and in our communities that will be uplifting, wholesome, faith-inspiring, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ELDER JOSEPH L. WIRTHLIN

#### *First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric*

This great conference, my brethren and sisters, has been a most inspirational occasion for all of us. As I heard one good sister remark yesterday, "It is out of this world," and I say to you that all that we have listened to is out of this world, and all of those who spoke to us have been animated by that spirit which is out of this world. All of the counsel and advice that we have listened to during this great conference will go for the salvation of all of us and for the eventual salvation of this world. Then at some future date it will become the celestial kingdom.

This morning President David O. McKay has delivered a most inspired address with reference to youth and particularly with reference to those who are responsible for youth, and I, too, desire to express a few thoughts along the same line and in so doing I may cross the path of President David O. McKay, but I don't know of anyone's path that I would rather follow than a member of the First Presidency.

#### YOUTH PROGRAM OF THE CHURCH

This past week has been devoted by some of the great youth organizations to the problems of youth. Some of you have listened to the broadcasts that have come from youth organizations. All that I have listened to and all that I have read with reference to this youth movement has been inspiring and is worthy of commendation. But in thinking of youth organizations of the world, the question came to my mind, what about the youth program of the restored Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? As I pondered over that question, there came to my mind the thought that the youth program of the Church of Jesus Christ is founded upon the priesthood of Almighty God. This program had its inception on May 15th, 1829, when two young men who were translating an ancient record ran across a statement that had to do with baptism. A question arose in their minds, so they went out into the woods and upon the bank of a beautiful river, supplicated God that they might have the right interpretation of that ancient scripture. An answer was given in the form of a visitation by a resurrected being who introduced himself as John the Baptist, and in the following words conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery the Aaronic Priesthood:

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. (D. & C. 13.)

The cornerstone of the youth program of this Church is the priesthood of God, and along with it there have come into being other organizations, which have come into existence through the inspiration and revelation of the Lord to the leaders of Israel to organize the great Sunday School, the M.I.A., and the Primary organization. There has been brought into being the great system of religious education and also the Latter-day Saint girls' program. This program of youth, which has been and is being fostered by the Church, is one which comprehends all of the needs of youth and places into the hands of those who are responsible for them, instruments whereby this great program can be implemented in behalf of youth to guide and direct them along the paths of faith, virtue, and service to others.

#### BLESSINGS OF AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

When the priesthood of Aaron was first given to the tribe of Levi, it was entrusted to mature men, but in this day and age the Aaronic Priesthood has been given to young men because of the fact that the members of the tribe of Levi are not worthy to hold that priesthood, and hence the heirs of Ephraim are carrying on the work of the Aaronic Priesthood today. We have often been asked the question, "Why is it that the priesthood is bestowed upon boys at the age of twelve?" I don't know whether or not there is on record any definite instructions as to this, but I can say it was a master stroke of inspiration, and I am sure that when the leadership of this Church decided to ordain boys at the age of twelve it came at the direction of our Heavenly Father. I know of no time in the age of any young man when he begins to form impressions and habits more readily than he does at the age of twelve, and in this great program of youth we commence early. These boys at the age of twelve, when they receive the priesthood of God, must be sweet and clean in their bodies. They are taught the law of chastity. They are taught that there is but one standard of virtue in this Church, both for young men and for young women. They are taught to be prayerful, and they are taught that priesthood means service and that where there is no service, and a man or a boy holds the priesthood, it is of little value to him and surely the Lord God will hold such an individual accountable when he fails to use this divine gift of authority in the service of the Master and for the benefit of the Lord's children here upon the earth. Out of priesthood service he is taught to be dependable; he evaluates integrity and honesty highly. He is taught something about the Constitution of the United States. He is taught

that the document came to us from the Lord through the instrumentality of great and wise men who were raised up for that very purpose. He is taught that in the Constitution of the United States there is found the great fundamental principle of the gospel, namely that of free agency. And so with these noble qualities of character and the assignments that come to him from time to time, he is taught in a practical way the principles and fundamentals of the gospel of salvation. For example, the deacon is assigned to go out and collect the contributions of the people to the end that those who are in distress might have assistance and relief. He is also taught that he should participate in the great welfare program, for out of these two assignments he is taught what pure and undefiled religion is, namely, to help those who are in need, the aged, the widows, and the orphans. I am sure that no young man participates in these assignments but what he sees the blessings that will come to him and to others because of his willingness to serve.

#### DUTIES OF DEACONS AND TEACHERS

The deacon has the privilege of assisting in the administration of the sacrament, and no young man could listen to the sacramental prayers and not have a deep and lasting impression of what the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ means and what his great sacrifice on the cross did for all of us. The office of the ordained teacher carries great responsibility. At the age of fifteen he is sent out with a member of the Melchizedek Priesthood to teach Israel the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other religious organizations there would be some question with reference to sending out a young man at the tender age of fifteen to teach adults and others the principles of the gospel. I bear personal testimony to you that some of the most impressive ward teaching that I have ever listened to has fallen from the lips of these young servants of God, and we must never forget that they have a promise, a promise that if they will do their duty, they will enjoy that spirit of testimony, namely the Holy Ghost, which will magnify them before the families that they are called upon to visit. These young men have other assignments, and out of all of them there comes a realization that they are engaged in the work of the Lord.

#### THE OFFICE OF PRIEST

What about the young man just budding into manhood who is called to the office of priest? He has the same authority and the same privilege that John the Baptist had, the forerunner of Christ, in that it is his high privilege and honor to perform the ordinance of baptism; and I would that every priest in this Church may have that opportunity and privilege, for out of it comes the assurance that he holds the priesthood of Almighty God.

When a priest steps into the waters of baptism and brings his

arm to the square and repeats the baptismal prayer, it impresses him that he is indeed a servant of God. These are the words he repeats: "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." A short prayer but a prayer wherein he declares without any reservations that he has been commissioned of Jesus Christ to perform the holy ordinance of baptism.

The priest has the right of administering the sacrament, of blessing the water and the bread; and no young man can repeat these blessings thoughtfully and prayerfully but what it strengthens his testimony that the lowly Nazarene who was crucified upon Calvary's Hill was the true and the Living Son of God, and that the Redeemer appeared in the meridian of time to another young man, Joseph Smith, who gave to the world the sweetest story ever told, since the crucifixion, that He lives. There is no doubt but what these experiences in the priesthood affect the lives of these young men to the end that what they do, or think, or say, shall be wholly compatible with the priesthood which they hold. It is as Brigham Young said, if these boys have been guided and directed and taught as they should be, all the acts they perform should be governed by the guidance of the priesthood.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS OF AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

In 1947, fifty-four thousand members of the Aaronic Priesthood filled 1,403,461 assignments, twenty-six assignments for every one of these young men, which indicates that they would have a priesthood assignment every two weeks throughout the year. There are some of these young men who are not taking full advantage of their priesthood work, which would indicate that some members of the Aaronic Priesthood filled in a year one hundred or one hundred and fifty of these assignments. Out of the filling of these assignments there comes a strengthening of their testimony; there comes that training which guides them into the paths of virtue, of being prayerful and dependable, and a building up of the spiritual side of their lives.

I could go on indefinitely pointing out to you the achievements of these young men. When we speak of the Aaronic Priesthood and this great youth program of the Church, we not only find emphasis on the priesthood, which should come first, but we find the great auxiliary organizations providing a program that inspires them and builds them up in their faith and lays the foundation for a testimony. We are grateful to the great Primary organization for its work with boys under the age of twelve, and giving them instructions on the priesthood that they are about to receive. The Sunday School organization has the responsibility of teaching young men the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Y.M.M.I.A. organization provides for them a fine cultural and recreational program, and in addition to

these two, it has fostered a great program for boys, namely, scouting.

The Church educational system affords daily religious education. The Latter-day Saint girls' program has in it all of the same factors and elements that we have for the young men, and it too is proving to be a great success.

### FRUITS OF RELIGIOUS LIVING

As we think of these assignments and priesthood training and all that the auxiliary organizations offer to our young people, we wonder what the fruits of their lives will be. President McKay has indicated to you already what the fruits are in some instances. It is best illustrated in the words of the Savior found in Matthew:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. . . .

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matt. 7:16-17, 20.)

What are the fruits of the priesthood? Some of them are service, testimony, virtue, honesty, prayerfulness, dependability, respect for authority, and selection of the proper kind of associates. As one of the General Authorities it has been my high privilege to interview many of these young people for missions. Some of these young men have spent several years in the armed forces of our country, and upon returning have expressed a desire to fill a mission. I have invariably asked them the question: "You have been away from home now for three or four years, and you mean to say that you are now anxious to go and spend two more years on a mission?" And without hesitating they have answered, "Yes, that's the thing I would like to do." They saved their money while in the armed forces, to the end that it might be used in preaching the word of God to the nations of the earth.

I learned something else about them. Some of them expressed a desire to return to the lands of the enemy whose guns they had faced. To me that manifested the true spirit of the Christ. That spirit, my brethren, that the Savior taught us to cultivate, to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, to me is the spirit of the peacemaker.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (Matt. 5:9.)

### BLESSINGS OF PRIESTHOOD SERVICE

The other fruits of the youth program of the Church have been manifested in other ways. In the fields of business the young men, who have taken full advantage of all of their priesthood opportunities and all the privileges afforded by the youth program of the Church,

have received responsible positions without any question and have been successful.

I know of one man whose life's desire was living the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He took advantage of the opportunities of priesthood service in his boyhood days, and not long ago a great company was searching for a very dependable man to take over one of its institutions, and they let it be known that no one should apply except a member of the Church. This young man applied and received the position at a salary of ten thousand dollars a year. Why was that company particularly anxious to have a member of this Church? They knew that, if they found the right kind of member of this Church, they would have a man with integrity and honesty, dependability, and one who would be an example to those who worked with him.

There are some of our young men who become indifferent for one reason or another, but I want to say that if we have done our part, if we have planted the seeds of faith in their hearts, they cannot get too far away from the Church.

#### LETTER TO BISHOP

I should like to read to you a few paragraphs of a letter written to one of our fine bishops by one of these boys who had all of the advantages of the youth program of the Church and then became indifferent.

The teachings a fellow receives in his youth have a great effect upon his life which I am just beginning to find out more and more each day. The teachings and blessings I received from my quorum while I was a teacher and a priest have paid off so numerously that I could not begin to quote all of them. Also the instructions I received in seminary have been of great value. The things my parents taught me from the time I could sit up in bed have also made me what I am today. Now, as I stop to look back upon all of the instructions, both large and small, that I received in my past twenty-one years, I have more in the wealth of the better things in life now than a lot of people have in a lifetime.

I want you to listen to this statement in particular.

I am a cross section of all the people that have had an influence on my life here so far. From here on out I am on my own, and it has taken me two years of married life to find it out. The responsibilities of an L.D.S. father are great, and I thank the Lord for the trust that he has put in me to carry out such responsibilities. When we were in our priesthood quorums I heard a lot about a person's being spiritually sick, and I always wondered what it was. The big wonder in my mind is now a reality. I don't wonder what it is now. I know. It has been said that experience is the best teacher, and my mother always said there would be a lot of things I would learn the hard way, and she is so right. To be spiritually sick is a lost feeling. You have your friends, but they seem to have no way of helping you no matter what they say or do. It is something that is lost from inside, and the only way you can get it back is from the inside. I have never really stepped inside an L.D.S. chapel for the past two years with an attitude of real worship of God, until the other night when I went to the nurses' graduation at the Idaho

Falls L.D.S. Tabernacle. Elder Moyle spoke that night, and I realized then that I had lost a very valuable gift which I still had in my power to regain if I put my mind to it.

#### RESPONSIBILITY TO YOUTH

This young man took advantage of the youth program of the Church. For some reason he became indifferent, but as a result of the proper kind of teaching and the impression it made upon his life when he heard a servant of God preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, there was a ready response in his heart, and now that young man is trying to find his way back, I was particularly impressed with his thought, "I am a cross section of all the people that have had an influence upon my life here so far." I wonder if we who are responsible for the youth of Israel realize that they are a cross section of what we teach them, not only by precept but by example. After all, every man or woman, whether a parent, one of the lesser priesthood advisers, or a bishop, is wholly responsible for these young people. As one said, "We stand in the docket with every lost boy and girl. Have we a self that is worth putting into a boy?" That is the question, and should we not examine our inner selves to determine whether or not we have within us the qualities of character which should become a part of the character of every boy and girl to make them the kind of men and women that God wants them to be?

Out of youth there will come in thought and in deed the things that you and I have taught them over the years. If we sow the right kind of seed, it will logically follow that the right kind of fruit will come forth.

May God bless all of us who have this high and glorious privilege of laboring with youth, that out of our testimonies, out of our teachings, and above all, out of our examples, it will be as Brigham Young declared:

An individual who holds a share in the priesthood, and continues faithful to his calling, who delights himself continually in doing the things God requires at his hands, and continues through life in the performance of every duty will secure to himself not only the privilege of receiving, but the knowledge how to receive the things of God, that he may know the mind of God continually; and he will be enabled to discern between right and wrong, between the things of God and the things that are not of God. And the priesthood—the spirit that is within him, will continue to increase until it becomes like a fountain of living water; until it is like the tree of life; until it is one continued source of intelligence and instruction to that individual.

I humbly pray for all of these blessings in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Choir and congregation sang the hymn: "For the Strength of the Hills," Elder Richard P. Condie directing.