

## BISHOP JOSEPH L. WIRTHLIN

*Presiding Bishop of the Church*

**W**ITH ten thousand eyes upon you, with ten thousand receptive minds, and ten thousand open hearts before you, an individual in this position must approach his assignment in the spirit of prayer and with a spirit of humility to the end that the Lord's Holy Spirit will give him inspiration for the moment or two that he stands before you. That is my earnest prayer.

One of the most thrilling and inspiring events in connection with the restoration of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, took place when two young men who were translating a holy record, came across a passage that had to do with the ordinance of baptism.

It was not clear to them, and as they were wont to do, they went into the woods on the banks of a great river in the state of Pennsylvania, and supplicated the Lord mightily that they might have an understanding relative to the ordinance of baptism, and in answer to that prayer, a heavenly being appeared unto them, announced himself as John the Baptist, indicating to them that he had been sent by Peter, James and John, the First Presidency of the Church in the days of the Apostles, the Presidency of the Holy Priesthood.

Peter, James and John had sent John the Baptist to restore the Aaronic Priesthood, and laying his hands upon Joseph Smith's and Oliver Cowdery's heads, he said these words: "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)

Brethren, when we think of the marvelous restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, that divine power that John the Baptist held at the time Christ was upon

the earth, it is no small matter to hold the Aaronic Priesthood.

Joseph Smith said, "The Priesthood is an everlasting principle that existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years." The keys have to be brought from Heaven whenever the Gospel is sent, the Aaronic Priesthood had been taken from the earth because of the great Apostasy that took place shortly after the Apostles, and in order for it to be restored to mankind, it had to be brought from the heavens. Hence John, the servant of God who had held those keys 2000 years previously returned with it.

Joseph Smith said again: "It is that which places a man in the condition to receive the ministration of angels and to enjoy the presence of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ."

In this Church, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are 113,000 holders of the Aaronic Priesthood. There are thousands of men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, and with this precious gift, the Lord expects us to be diligent and earnest in his service. He declared in the 107th Section, 99th verse, of the Doctrine and Covenants: "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."

We find in the 113,000 members of the Aaronic Priesthood there are 60,000 over the age of 21 years, and 53,000 under the age of 21. In 1951, 3,300 of these brethren over the age of 21 were advanced to the Melchizedek Priesthood, but there were 2516 men who joined the older group of the Aaronic Priesthood, 2516 more than were advanced to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Some of the factors contributing to the size of the older group of the Aaronic Priesthood of the Church are these: We have noted over the war years that many have enlisted in the

Armed Services of the nation at the ages of 16, 17, and 18 and have remained in the Armed Services so long that by the time they have returned home they have attained the age of 21, which has left them without a quorum affiliation.

Another contributing factor is that we do not make enough contacts with these brethren. There seems to have grown into the Church a feeling of segregation. These brethren have felt that they are somewhat apart from the rest of the Aaronic Priesthood. There is a lack of a feeling of belonging to some quorum, and no doubt they have the right to that feeling because these 60,000 men have no quorum affiliations.

With the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, the Lord revealed to the Prophet its organization. There were to be quorums of deacons with twelve members; quorums of teachers with 24 members; quorums of priests with 48 members; presided over by a presidency, a quorum president, his two counselors and a secretary, and the head of the whole ward Aaronic Priesthood presidency would be the bishop as the president, and his two counselors.

If all of these 60,000 men were organized into quorums, as the Lord indicated they should be there would be 2793 more Aaronic Priesthood quorums in the Church. If officers were selected for the teachers' and the deacons' quorums, three members in the presidency and one secretary, there would be brought into activity to officer these new Aaronic Priesthood quorums, 7064 officers. Just imagine the potential strength in 2793 new quorums, the available service, and the activity that individual members would derive from priesthood assignments, fulfilling the mandate of the Lord, found in Section 107; verse 99 of the Doctrine and Covenants: "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed in all diligence."

So after careful consideration, the Presiding Bishopric presented the following plan to the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve which they

have approved. The plan is as follows:

We have felt for a long time that the title, "Adult Aaronic Priesthood," should be changed for many reasons. Hence, the names, senior deacon, senior teacher, and senior priest were suggested to the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, which they approved. The older group of the Aaronic Priesthood will now be known as the Senior Aaronic Priesthood. Its members will be known as senior deacons, senior teachers and senior priests.

In addition to this vast number of older men holding the Aaronic Priesthood, we have another group of men over the age of 21 who hold no priesthood. There are 20,000 of them. The bishops of the wards are responsible for this group because they are members of the various wards in which they reside.

We are inviting the bishops of the wards in the Church to make a very careful survey of all members of the Aaronic Priesthood over the age of 21, to the end that they might be organized in quorums of deacons, teachers, and priests as the Lord revealed to us through the Prophet Joseph Smith. From their numbers the bishopric should select men to preside over these quorums as presidencies with the exception of the priests' quorum over which the bishop presides.

In addition to organizing these quorums and calling 7000 men to officer them there will be a great need for the help of elders, seventies, and high priests, and in the wards of the Church there are many elders, there are many seventies, there are many high priests, who are available for this glorious service to assist this vast army of the Aaronic Priesthood to effect quorum organizations to the end that they might render the service the Lord expects of them.

The present plan provides one Melchizedek Priesthood adviser to every five men. This plan will continue, these advisers in the Aaronic Priesthood quorums will be of great assistance to the presidencies, each senior member of the Aaronic Priesthood to be visited,

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persuaded and counseled to join his quorum.

This work demands of all Aaronic Priesthood workers the spirit of tolerance, the spirit of patience and the spirit to persevere and never give up. These men cannot be criticized into activity, neither can they be preached into the Church, but by the spirit of love, tolerance and patience, brethren, they will follow us if we will but mark the way for them.

We will set up as of the first of the year, a study course for the senior members of the Aaronic Priesthood, and as a text we have chosen the book, "A Marvelous Work And A Wonder," written by Elder LeGrand Richards of the Council of the Twelve, one of the great missionaries of the Church, a man, who because of his understanding of the Gospel and his missionary experiences, has had the ability to put into book form the teachings that are necessary to convert people to the Gospel.

We feel that many of these men will need conversion and hence this splendid text will be used during the year 1953. In addition thereto, there should be an activity program. It is true that they have rendered a great service in the Welfare Program. They enjoy working in the Welfare Program, and when they are organized into quorums they should have assigned to them definite projects.

We have the blind in our midst. A survey is now being made of the Church to determine how many of our members are blind. We know in the state of Utah there are over 1200 of them, and we wonder how often they get to sacrament meeting. How many times do they have the privilege of attending Sunday School or their Priesthood meeting?

This would be a fine project for the senior members of the Aaronic Priesthood to take care of, and see that these older brethren and sisters and the blind have the privilege of attending all of their meetings.

We think it would be a fine thing if senior Aaronic Priesthood quorums

might organize a personal welfare committee for the purpose of helping any of their fellow quorum members who might be in distress, where there might be sickness and unemployment.

In connection with the Aaronic priesthood work, it seems over the years that one barrier to the activity of our brethren has been the matter of age. The Lord is no respecter of persons with reference to age.

When the Aaronic Priesthood was organized in the days of Aaron and Moses and at the time that Moses was taken away, and the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken away with him, the Aaronic Priesthood was the only Priesthood that the Children of Israel had in their midst. Aaron stood at its head. Twenty-two thousand members of the tribe of Levi were given to him to render the service needed in that priesthood, and in that group of 22,000 men, there were older men and there could have been younger men.

Now in contrast to that I want to call to your attention the ordination of John the Baptist. You will recall that through the centuries, from the time of Aaron to the advent of John the Baptist, the Aaronic Priesthood had deteriorated. It had become an instrument in the hands of wicked men, its powers were taken back into the heavens, and in order to prepare the world for the second coming of the Christ, the Lord sent his servant, John the Baptist, to preach the Gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and to call all men to repentance, for, said he: "There is one that will follow me that is greater than I."

John the Baptist was called into the service of the Aaronic Priesthood at a tender age. The Lord revealed this interesting event to the Prophet Joseph in Section 84, verse 28 of the Doctrine and Covenants, when he indicated that an angel from Heaven came down and ordained John at the age of eight days, and so brethren, as far as age is concerned, it is of no consequence.

In the days of Aaron, the Lord selected older men, and in the case of

John the Baptist, he selected a child. So as far as the Aaronic Priesthood is concerned, and its responsibilities and the service it must render, age is no barrier.

During the presidency of Peter, James and John, those selected to render service in the Aaronic Priesthood were older men. Paul's message to Timothy declared, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

"Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

"And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

"Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." (I Timothy 3:8-12)

This quotation is an evidence that in the days of the Apostles, men were called to serve in the office of a deacon, in the office of a teacher and in the office of a priest.

As I consider the duties of the Aaronic Priesthood and the duties that Senior members of the Aaronic Priesthood should accept and fulfill with all the dignity and the honor at their command, there are some services in the Aaronic Priesthood wherein experienced and older men are needed.

I refer particularly to the 84th Section, verses 107 to 111 of the Doctrine and Covenants, where the Lord had revealed to the Prophet Joseph that the time had come when the elders and the members of the Melchizedek Priesthood should go out into the world and preach the Restored Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord declared: "Therefore, take with you those who are ordained unto the lesser priesthood, and send them before you to make appointments and to prepare the way and to fill appointments that you, yourselves, are not able to fill.

"Behold, this is the way that mine apostles, in ancient days built up my

Church unto me." (D. & C. Section 84:107-108)

Here is a mandate coming from the Lord to the holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood to use members of the lesser priesthood to go before them and to prepare the way, make appointments, and should there be occasions where these brethren of the Melchizedek Priesthood could not keep their appointments, then these brethren of the lesser priesthood are to have that responsibility.

Again the Lord speaks: "Therefore, let every man stand in his own office and labor in his own calling; and let not the head say unto the feet it hath no need of the feet; for without the feet how shall the body be able to stand?

"Also the body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together, that the system may be kept perfect." (D. & C. Section 84:109-110)

So, by the use of the lesser priesthood in connection with the promulgation of the Gospel as the Melchizedek Priesthood carried it forward in the early days of the first Apostles, the Lord requires the use of the lesser priesthood to the end, as he said, that the system may be kept perfect.

I am sure we want to keep the system of the Priesthood perfect today, that the Melchizedek Priesthood cannot say to the lesser priesthood, "I have no need of thee," neither can the Lesser say to the Melchizedek Priesthood, "I have no need of thee," but that they labor together, and be edified together, as the Lord indicates in this revelation.

Again, the Lord goes on to say: "And behold, the high priests should travel, and also the elders, and also the lesser priests; but the deacons and teachers should be appointed to watch over the Church, to be standing ministers unto the Church." (D. & C. 84:111)

And should the time ever come again, and it might come, when the Melchizedek Priesthood will be called out to preach the Gospel to all the world, and that those who shall be left behind to stand as ministers unto the Church, may well be deacons and teachers as the Lord reveals—should that time

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come, I am sure it will require members of the Aaronic Priesthood, men of experience, and men of judgment.

And, there is definitely a place in the Aaronic Priesthood for older men, and there is no such thing as an age barrier. I think as these Aaronic Priesthood quorums are organized and begin to function, and these men qualify to render service, it would be a grand and glorious thing to call upon a senior quorum of deacons to pass the sacrament.

I know of no more inspiring experience than to participate in the administration of the Lord's last supper, and the matter of collecting the Fast Offerings. I am sure they could be most helpful in connection with the younger deacons, particularly in the widely spread areas of the Church, where they might take their automobiles and with a younger companion, visit the homes of the Saints, and gather up the Fast Offerings, that the necessities of life might be in the Bishop's Storehouse, and those who are in distress taken care of, the orphans, the widows, and the unemployed, which Paul called "pure and undefiled religion."

The duties of the ordained teacher are inspiring and uplifting for all who participate in this glorious project of teaching. Senior members of the Aaronic Priesthood should be called upon for this service as soon as they qualify, to go out at first with a member of the Melchizedek Priesthood, to teach the people the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to watch over the Church always, to be with and strengthen them, and to see that there is no iniquity in the Church, etc.

I am quite sure that any man who has the spirit of his calling in the Aaronic Priesthood as a teacher would feel it a glorious and a grand opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the great teacher, even Jesus Christ.

The office of a priest offers many glorious and inspiring experiences, particularly when a priest has the assignment to perform the ordinance of baptism. Taking the candidate into the water and raising his arm to the square,

he repeats the revealed baptismal prayer which is as follows: "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."

This is a short prayer, but in it there is a great revelation to the world, and that revelation, the restored commission to baptize people in the name of the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ and in the name of the Holy Ghost, was returned to the earth when John the Baptist bestowed these keys upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. This sacred opportunity every senior priest should gladly accept with a testimony in his heart that he has a divine commission and authority.

My, what a glorious experience comes when a priest kneels beside the sacrament table and has the privilege of blessing the broken bread and the cup in commemoration of the sacrifice of the Son of God.

I am sure that all of these services, and all of these experiences will go to building into the hearts of the senior members of the Aaronic Priesthood in this Church, a testimony that they indeed hold authority from on high.

Now in connection with our brethren who hold no priesthood, and who are over the age of 21, they will be invited to attend the deacons' quorums, where they, too, might receive instruction with reference to the Gospel, and the duties of the priesthood.

The question may be asked, "When can these men render service?" May we say they can render service as quickly as they qualify. Among these men there are thousands and thousands of men with noble hearts—good men, good citizens, fine individuals. All they need is leadership, kindness, patience, and I assure you that many of them will readily accept the opportunity of becoming affiliated with one of the priesthood quorums of the Church of Jesus Christ.

May I emphasize again that the bishops of the wards stand as the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood. They do not preside over the Melchizedek Priesthood. That presidency

rests in the presidencies of the stakes and the First Presidency of the Church. The bishops of the wards only preside over Melchizedek Priesthood members as members of the wards, but as members of the ward they can be called upon by the presiding authority, the bishop, to render such service as he may deem necessary.

Now, brethren, if we render service in this, the Priesthood of God, he has made us definite promises, and God always keeps his promises to those who are faithful and obedient. He has promised us in the 84th Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 33 and 34, this:

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

"They become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the Church and kingdom, and the elect of God."

Can you anticipate any blessing more desirable than to become the very elect of God? To become the very elect of God anticipates that when we return to him and live with him through the eternities yet to come, it will be in the Celestial kingdom, and that is the objective for which all of us are striving here in mortality.

But all of these blessings are contingent upon this mandate given to us in the 107th Section and the 99th verse of the Doctrine & Covenants: "Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence."

I humbly pray that the Lord will bless all of us, that we will learn our duty, that we will act in the offices to which we are appointed with all diligence, to the end that we may become the very elect of God, and live with him in the Celestial kingdom, which I humbly pray will be the blessing of all of us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### President David O. McKay:

This afternoon, in announcing the Priesthood Meeting, it was stated that the attendance would be confined to the Tabernacle, the Assembly Hall, and the Barratt Hall, and only those holding the Priesthood should attempt to enter, implying that these services, of course, would not be broadcast, as they are not.

However, since the beginning of this meeting, we have received the following: "There are thousands of people on the grounds who are anxious to hear the Priesthood message. Would it be possible to have the loud speakers on. Many of the men here are from distant cities and are disappointed at being unable to hear." Signed by a counselor in a bishopric.

Upon receiving that, the Brethren of the Presidency permitted the loud speakers to be used, so all the proceedings now are being broadcast over our loud speakers on the grounds. If we just had a tent over the Tabernacle Grounds we would have our Priesthood audience.

In addition to that we have just received a telephone message from the Field House in Provo. Brother Terry reports that some 800 to 1000 are listening in over a private line and are getting a clear reception.

Will the ushers kindly make as accurate a count as you can of the attendance in all three buildings, on the grounds, and we shall add this thousand in Provo.

The congregation and all listening in will now join in singing, "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go, Dear Lord."

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The Tabernacle Choir Men's Chorus and the congregation sang the Hymn, "I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go, Dear Lord."