

Bishop Victor L. Brown**Of the Presiding Bishopric**

In the center section of this historic Tabernacle sits a group of men from many parts of the world. Each one has responsibilities that set him apart from others not of his group. Almost every weekend it is our opportunity to meet the bishops of the Church in their own stakes. Today we are privileged to meet them in general conference. We have the greatest of love and respect for them and are grateful for the great work they are doing.

Importance of bishops

Before I became a bishop, I knew little about the responsibilities of the office. I have thought perhaps that other members of the Church may be as uninformed as I was. The bishop is, or should be, one of the most important persons in the life of every member of the Church. If he is important to us, then we must be important to him. I pray that I may be able to say something that will draw the bishops closer to their members, but even more so, the members closer to their bishops.

To understand the bishop, we must know something of his responsibilities. They are many. Time is limited, so we will discuss only a few. First, we will review two of his temporal responsibilities—care of the needy and finances.

The welfare program

Frequently we hear the statement, in connection with the Welfare Program, that the Church takes care of its own. The bishop plays the key role in administering the Welfare Program. He, and he alone, determines who will receive assistance, in what form it will be, and, with the help of the Relief Society president, how much.

The bishop approaches this assignment in a spirit of love, kindness, and understanding. One of his prime goals is to help the people maintain their

self-respect and dignity. He has certain principles upon which he administers the program.

The first principle is that we as members of the Church are expected to be self-reliant and independent. We are taught to have a year's supply in reserve in case of serious difficulty. Should circumstances, such as a serious accident or illness, result in our needing help, we should look to our families. If they cannot help, only then do we look to the bishop.

After a very careful, personal investigation, the bishop decides whether the Church should render assistance. If he decides it should, the assistance will be limited to the necessities of life, and only as long as it takes to get the family back on its feet. The bishop is not expected to bail us out of financial difficulty caused by poor management of our affairs.

If he gives assistance, he will expect us to work for it if we are physically able. His motive here is to help us maintain our self-respect by not accepting a dole. Frankly, many times it would be much easier for him to give a dole. But he recognizes the dole as an evil, and it is his desire to bless us with the program, not weaken us.

There are many other facets of the program, such as fast offering, welfare projects, budgets, and bishops storehouses. As members of the Church we are expected to respond to the call of the bishop and his welfare committee in each phase of the program. In some areas of the world the Welfare Program is conducted on a limited basis. In these cases, we are still expected to support the bishop within the established policies.

Finances

Now as to finances: The bishop must look to the members of his ward for the financial support necessary to carry on the affairs of the ward.

One of the worrisome problems some bishops have is collecting funds

Saturday, April 6

Second Day

for the ward budget. These are the funds that are needed to operate the ward organizations and to share in the costs of maintaining the chapel. We, as members of the ward, can offer great assistance to the bishop if we will be responsive to his requests for financial assistance. The Lord said he would open the windows of heaven and pour out blessings that there would hardly be room enough to receive, if we would pay our tithes and offerings.

The bishop realizes that all funds collected by him are sacred, and that they come as a free-will offering. Through our willingness to sustain him in financial matters, we help lighten his load.

Spiritual responsibilities

So far we have discussed only temporal matters. Now let us review some of his spiritual responsibilities.

The bishop, by revelation from the Lord, is the president of the priests quorum. He and his counselors constitute the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood in his ward. He is the cornerstone in all matters pertaining to the youth, both boys and girls. He receives help from his counselors, home teachers, general secretaries, advisers, auxiliary officers and teachers; but he is still the keystone in all that is done.

To the young people may I say: the bishop has been called through the inspiration of our Heavenly Father to be your spiritual counselor. He is designated as a common judge by the Lord. He has a special blessing, giving him the power of discernment and understanding. He is the one to whom we should go to confess our sins. This must be done if we are to fully repent. The bishop recognizes that it is through the blessings of the Lord that he is a judge, and unless he is a righteous judge, he is liable to condemnation, for in the scriptures we read: "That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and 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, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man." (D&C 121:36-37.)

Wisdom of bishops

The bishop is unalterably opposed to sin in any guise; at the same time, he has great understanding and forgiveness for the sinner. He recognizes many problems of life and is anxious to lend a helping hand, particularly when the going is difficult. He can help you in many ways if you will just let him. Anything you disclose to your bishop is expected to be kept as a sacred trust. May I encourage you to let your bishop bless you with his wisdom. Get close to him. He will never be too busy to help you.

There is another basic spiritual responsibility that may be interpreted as encompassing all others. The bishop is the spiritual father of the ward, the presiding high priest. This responsibility spreads his umbrella wide enough to cover us all.

Helpers to bishop

He has a host of helpers to assist him in this. They are the home teachers. This is a responsibility of the priesthood holder, which, if carried out devotedly, will lift a great load from the bishop's shoulders. The home teacher is in reality an assistant to the bishop. He is the major contact with the family. One bishop made the comment that one of the highest compliments he had been paid was to have a family call their home teacher first in the case of sickness. President McKay has said that if the home teachers do their duty, in the case of a death in the family the home teachers would be called first, not the bishop. May I encourage each home

teacher to sense his responsibility and carry out his duty as an assistant to the bishop.

As the father of the ward, the bishop has many other helpers. Each officer and teacher of the ward assists him. We, as ward members, have a responsibility to respond to calls from the bishop. He should be able to depend on us to carry out our assignments. He needs the help of all of us. With that help, not only does the work of the Lord progress, but we individually are also blessed with a kind of happiness that comes from no other source, because we show evidence of our love for our Heavenly Father; for the scriptures say, ". . . when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God." (Mosiah 2:17.)

Who is the bishop?

Who is this bishop we have been talking about? He may be the neighbor next door; he may be the son of your close friends; he may be that noisy boy you had in your Sunday School class just a few years ago—you remember, the one you were ready to send out, never to come back.

He almost always is a husband, generally a father, always a breadwinner. He is faced with all of the problems you and I have. He has his human frailties and weaknesses, his likes and dislikes, maybe even some idiosyncrasies. Yes, he is a human being—a special human being because of a special calling with a special blessing. Here is what the Lord said he must be: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

"Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

"(For if a man know not how to

rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Tim. 3:2-6.)

Family shares responsibility

This man, your bishop, did not ask for this position; he did not even volunteer. He most likely accepted the calling with fear and trembling, yet with the faith and desire to perfect himself so as to measure up to that which the Lord expects of him.

His loyal, loving wife and his children have also agreed to share in his responsibility with him, by not complaining when he is away from home so much of the time, by being cheerful when the telephone always rings at dinner time or three o'clock in the morning, and by being willing to carry some of the responsibility that normally belongs to the husband and father.

May the Lord's choicest blessings be showered upon the heads of these wonderful, devoted bishops, their wives, and their children; and may we, the members of their wards, respond to their leadership, even when some of them seem so young, and though some we would not have chosen ourselves. The Lord will bless us for sustaining the servants he has called to preside over us. I bear you my witness that this is the Church of Jesus Christ, that the bishops of this Church have been called by our Heavenly Father through the inspiration extended to those who preside over us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Joseph Fielding Smith

We have just listened to Elder Victor L. Brown of the Presiding Bishopric.

Elder S. Dilworth Young of the First Council of Seventy will now speak to us. He will be followed by Elder Richard L. Evans of the Council of the Twelve, who will be our concluding speaker for this session.