

Elder Robert L. Backman

President, Aaronic Priesthood MIA

My beloved brethren: Last Saturday I was honored to speak to several hundred young men and women graduating seminary students from the high schools in Utah Valley. Under the leadership of a council of their own peers, they had planned a full day's activity, which included visits to Welfare Square and the Beehive House, a talent assembly, a devotional and testimony meeting, and a lovely dance. To my knowledge, the only adult who took active part was the area supervisor who introduced me. The rest of the adults present were there to give silent support and, by evening, were feeling their age after sharing a day of youthful vitality and enthusiastic activity.

Testimonies of youth

I wish every adult leader in the Church could have been in attendance to share the spirit of that testimony meeting. With deep emotion, one lovely girl spoke of her reaction when it was discovered that her father had cancer. How she prayed and prayed that he be healed, then came to the realization that her prayers were selfish—that our loving Father in heaven was in control and that she should submit to his will. She evidenced a very mature outlook on life, something that some of us as adults never experience in a lifetime of living.

A handsome young man, obviously a football player, told of how his testimony had been strengthened through association with fine, faithful friends, most of them a year older than he. Graduating from high school and soon to be separated from one another, they had a "last fling" together, a visit to the lovely

grounds of the Provo Temple. Then they went to a quiet spot where in the late evening hours 12 future leaders of the Church bore their testimonies of the divinity of the gospel and expressed their love for one another.

I have never heard so many expressions of love for friends and adult leaders who had influenced their lives.

The meeting was closed with "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." I have never heard those beautiful lyrics sung with more genuine feeling. Tears fell freely as those great young people sang from their hearts.

A royal generation

I mention their experience because it is so typical of many other experiences I have enjoyed among this royal generation of youth. As Bishop Brown has stated, there has never been a finer generation. I have great confidence that the kingdom of God will be in capable hands as they assume their future roles of leadership, and I am equally confident that they now are capable of assuming much more responsibility for their own welfare than we have been willing to give them.

With the new direction given to the Aaronic Priesthood MIA program, it now becomes our responsibility as adult leaders to give our youth the opportunity to grow in their capacity to lead, to serve, and to love.

Opportunities for leadership

What a challenge adult leaders have in helping youth, particularly youth leaders, to learn their duty and perform to their fullest capacity

while still leaving room for their own initiative and challenge as they anxiously engage in a good cause, doing many things of their own free will.

The Church leadership of the future will be built upon the foundation that is laid today. If youth are denied opportunities to test their own strength, then the leadership foundation will be weak and unready. Equally as serious, however, is thrusting unprepared youth leaders into situations in which they fail because the demands of that situation exceed their experience and capacity. Discouragement and doubt will result. The balance between enough responsibility and too much calls for fasting, prayer, and diligent service by youth and adult leadership as they labor together to build the kingdom. The Aaronic Priesthood MIA organization as introduced by Bishop Brown provides a setting where such a fine balance may be struck. With the bishopric of the ward—the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood—in direct charge, the bishop's youth committee, composed of the priests group leader, the Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidents, the girl class presidents, and the adult presidents of the Aaronic Priesthood MIA, becomes a forum where youth leaders can communicate with the bishopric. They can be totally involved in selecting their activities and be tested and taught great leadership principles without being smothered by too many adult leaders. Yet, this youth committee expands to the ward Aaronic Priesthood council with the addition of the adult leaders of the age groups, who can temper unbridled enthusiasm and zeal with their experience and practicality, exercising some degree of control without dominating the youth councils.

Bishops, an effective youth committee is vital to the success of your

Aaronic Priesthood program. It may surprise you what these bright young people will come up with in the way of individual and group service projects and meaningful activities or suggestions for implementing their program.

Youth service projects

If you have not discovered it yet, you will. Our young men and women have a deep sense of purpose and a keen appreciation for our social needs. They want to be of service; they want to be useful; they want to make this a better world in which to live. Witness the joy of the youth who gathered by the hundreds to clean ditches and gather the debris left by the recent floods in southern Arizona, or those who cleaned up an entire Utah community in a day of service.

An active youth committee in Cache Valley made it their project to take care of the aged and shut-ins. Each week the girls would prepare suppers and the boys would prepare lessons or activities to take to the homes of the unfortunate, giving them plenty of tender loving care in a family home evening situation. What do you think that did for those young people to be involved in such a worthy, compassionate service?

Their deep desire to be of service and to demonstrate their love can even benefit the bishop. In Sacramento, California, while the bishop was away on vacation with his family, the youth committee determined to paint his house. These young people had the time of their lives working together and anticipating the pleasant surprise of the bishop when he returned. A real bond of love was established between the youth and their bishop with such meaningful service.

Bishops, we urge you to make use of your youth committee; make it the effective instrument it should

be to meet the needs of the youth of your ward. I hope every one of you will keep in mind the words President David O. McKay gave us so stirringly: "The spirituality of a ward will be commensurate with the activity of the youth."

Leaders of youth

You will note, from Bishop Brown's explanation, that each member of the bishopric has been given a particular age group—both boys and girls—to direct. What a marvelous opportunity this gives for the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood to help our youth leaders learn the duties and responsibilities of their respective callings. And what a blessing it will be for our youth leaders to enjoy a close relationship with the great youth leaders of the ward.

Duties of quorum presidencies

To you Aaronic Priesthood quorum leaders, I hope you understand that the Lord outlined your duties as presidents of the Aaronic Priesthood quorums. He directed you to preside, to sit in council with your quorum members, and to teach them their duty. He didn't give that assignment to your advisers; he gave it to you. You share the responsibility, with the bishopric, of blessing the lives of every member of your quorum as you fulfill your sacred calling. What a transformation takes place when young Jack Smith becomes President John Smith, deacons quorum president, entitled to revelation from the Lord in directing the affairs of that quorum, and President Smith really assumes the responsibilities of his office. You are too young for such responsibility? The apostle Paul sensed something of the inadequacy young men feel when they are thrust into leadership.

He counseled his young "son in the faith," Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth. . . ." (1 Tim. 4:12.)

Dana Miller was approaching his twelfth birthday, looking forward to becoming a deacon. One evening, just prior to his birthday, the front doorbell rang. Dana's father, a high counselor in the stake, answered the door to find three young men on the porch. "We are the deacons presidency and have come to call on your son, Dana." Admitting these quorum leaders, Brother Miller retired to another room while the presidency sat down with Dana and outlined his duties and responsibilities as a priesthood holder. That visit had more impact on a boy's life than hours of counseling from an adult could have. Today Dana is president of the deacons quorum. What kind of a president do you think he is with that kind of an introduction to the priesthood and example from his leaders?

The Lord has assured us, "For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves." (D&C 58:28.)

Organized workers

My beloved young brethren, why are we so anxious to have you assume responsibility and learn your duties as priesthood bearers? Perhaps our reason was best stated by Elder Ezra Taft Benson in a speech he delivered to an Explorer conference several years ago. He said: "We are not a church of organized sitters; we are a church of organized workers, and we want you to get into it with all your enthusiasm and power. Young men, my brethren, we want you on the field. We want you sweating it out. We want you to have responsibility because you grow under responsibility."

Challenge given

You royal generation, you

special people that God has reserved to come forth in this day, may God bless you with an understanding of who you are and bless you with a knowledge and understanding of the mission that he has in store for you. May your lives reflect that you are disciples of Jesus Christ, and may you, like our elder brother, grow in "wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52), that you will be prepared for the awesome responsibilities that he has before you. I challenge you to do so, to honor your priesthood and to show these good brethren of ours, who are placing increased responsibility on you as bearers of the priesthood, that you are worthy of that honor.

I bear my witness to you that God is our Father, that he loves you. He has given you the opportunity to come to this life to gain a body and to experience the joys and the sorrows of life that you can return to him and be prepared for even greater service. May God bless all of us who render service to him. May we honor our priesthood and truly represent his cause, I pray humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Harold B. Lee

Elder James E. Faust, Assistant to the Council of the Twelve, and Managing Director of the Melchizedek Priesthood MIA, will now address us.

Elder James E. Faust

Assistant to the Council of the Twelve

My beloved brethren, I am humbled and honored by the transcending privilege of being able to speak to you in this great assemblage of the priesthood.

I express appreciation to the First Presidency for the assignment that I share with my choice colleagues, Elders Marion D. Hanks and L. Tom Perry, to have concern for the adult single members of the Church over 18 who have, on occasion, been referred to as the "forgotten ones." I am grateful to our advisers of the Twelve, Elders Thomas S. Monson, Boyd K. Packer, Marvin J. Ashton, and Bruce R. McConkie, for their constant interest and support, and to our director, Jeffrey R. Holland, as well as to the faithful and dedicated members of the general board.

Single adult members

During the past few months, we

have spent many hours listening. Most of the single adult members are well adjusted to life and its problems, but they still need the loving attention from the Church and its members to reaffirm their usefulness and the love that God has for each of them. They are not problem people, but many have problems, often not of their own making. A choice friend reminds us, "If you don't have any problems, just wait awhile."

We have been deeply moved and sobered as we have heard a common thread running through the expressions of many of the single adults. Loneliness and discouragement are for some their most constant companions. One great soul who has a good bishop, a good home teacher, a good position, and comfortable circumstances said, "I don't need more to do; I just need someone to do it with." This becomes a matter of great concern when we