

Bishop Victor L. Brown

Presiding Bishop

My dear brethren, I am deeply grateful to President Kimball for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. I think I would not be far wrong in estimating that approximately 90 percent of the bishops of the Church are present somewhere in this meeting tonight. I would hope that about the same percentage of Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies are present with their bishops. It is to the bishops and quorum presidencies I wish to direct my remarks.

Charge to Presiding Bishopric

At a meeting in the Salt Lake Temple, called by the First Presidency and attended by the Quorum of the Twelve and some of the other General Authorities on April 9, 1972, President Harold B. Lee charged the Presiding Bishopric with our responsibility in the following words:

"Now to the Presiding Bishopric, there are two great divisions of the priesthood as spelled out in the 107th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Aaronic Priesthood. The ecclesiastical title of those who head the Melchizedek Priesthood is the First Presidency, but their priesthood title is the Presidency of the High Priesthood of the Church. The title Presiding Bishopric is your ecclesiastical title, but your priesthood title is the Presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood of the whole Church. Having that in mind then, you must have clearly in mind that first and foremost of all responsibilities you have is to look after the Aaronic Priesthood. . . . You will help to bring the focus of the time to young men of these critical ages; and when we refer to the young men, we mean the girls also. We can't save the boys without the girls.

So all through your ministry remember, nothing should be secondary to placing great emphasis on the work of the Aaronic Priesthood, to work with the auxiliaries to see to it that they function in an auxiliary capacity, but always with the thought in mind of magnifying the priesthood and of making certain that no auxiliary takes ascendancy over the priesthood."

In response to this injunction and through revelation given to a prophet, the Aaronic Priesthood MIA program was given birth. It was announced to the Church one year ago now at April Conference, 1973. It was inaugurated in September of the same year. In effect it brought two auxiliaries, the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association and the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association, directly under the umbrella of the Aaronic Priesthood. They then became priesthood oriented and priesthood directed.

Evidence that this change was divine is just now beginning to break over the horizon. In just over seven months of operation, we see miracles taking place in the lives of our youth. These wonderful things are happening in every ward and branch of the Church where the adult leaders have caught the vision of the program and understand its source. As to its source, may I quote from President Lee's address at June Conference:

"One or two thoughts have impressed themselves upon me as we have witnessed and have listened. During the year that has passed, we have pondered, we have prayed, we have searched, and now we come with a declaration to all of you that you may know with a certainty that defies all doubt that this which you have witnessed, this which you have heard has been divinely inspired.

"I have occasion to recall again

and again what the Lord said: "And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments."

"But learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come." (D&C 59:21, 23.)

"I choose not to offend God by claiming that all of this has come by the will of men. I confess with all my soul that these things are of the Lord, and they have come through righteousness, through prayer, and through great needs." (*Ensign*, Sept. 1973, pp. 81-82.)

Basic principles of program

In my remarks tonight, I have nothing new to introduce, but if the Lord will bless me, I will attempt to discuss some of the basic principles of the program.

The guiding principle upon which we base all our efforts was given us by the Prophet Joseph Smith in response to a question of how he governed his people. As you know, he said, "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves." (*Priesthood and Church Government*, comp. John A. Widtsoe, Deseret Book Co., 1939, p. 100.) In all we and our associates, the general presidencies and their boards, are doing, we are merely trying to teach correct principles, adding a few suggestions and letting you stake presidencies, bishoprics, branch presidencies, and Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies govern yourselves.

Charge to all bishoprics

A moment ago I quoted President Lee's charge to the Presiding Bishopric. Except for scope, that same charge applies to every bishopric in the Church. As you bishops were ordained and set apart, in addition to being set apart as

the bishop of your ward, you were set apart as the president of the priests quorum of your ward and, with your counselors, as the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood of your ward. As President Lee said, this is your priesthood title, and it is "first and foremost of all responsibilities." He further stated, "When we refer to the young men, we mean the girls also." In other words, the youth of your wards are your first and foremost responsibility.

Although the principles we shall discuss would apply to almost any leadership setting, tonight I would like to point them directly at you bishops and you presidencies of Aaronic Priesthood quorums. One of the most stimulating influences being felt in this program today is resulting from peer leadership. You presidents and counselors in Aaronic Priesthood quorums are the file leaders of all members of your quorums, active and inactive. You have a responsibility for the total well-being and activity of each of your quorum members. This means that you not only conduct the quorum meeting Sunday morning or make assignments at the sacrament table, but you provide leadership in all services and activities. This is why you have been appointed to positions of leadership in the Scouting organization. You see, Scouting is a part of priesthood responsibility. As you gain an understanding of your stewardship, you will recognize your responsibility to your members as clearly as elders quorum presidents recognize theirs for the elders and prospective elders in their quorums. The Lord revealed in section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

"And again, verily I say unto you, the duty of a president over the office of a deacon is to preside over twelve deacons, to sit in council with them, and to teach them their duty, edifying one another, as it is given according to the covenants." (D&C 107:85.) And, of course, the same applies to the teachers quorum president.

Saturday, April 6

Second Day

Vital role of bishop

The bishop is president of the priests quorum. He is aided by a group leader. If these young men are to fulfill their stewardship and responsibilities, they must be taught correct principles. You bishops have a paramount role in seeing that they are taught properly. You have assistance, of course, from counselors and advisers, but your role is vital.

The most important and impressive lesson these young men will learn will be from you when you call them to these positions. If the call is casual, they will approach their responsibilities in a casual manner. If it is dignified and spiritual and you have by appointment invited the young man to your office for an interview, explaining to him as you call him that he is the one the Lord wants to fill this important office and that you have called him only after prayerful consideration, then he will understand the sacred nature of this important position and will make greater effort than ever to honor his priesthood. That first interview will have a lasting effect on his attitude toward his responsibility.

Personal interviews

Another very important teaching opportunity that you personally will have with him is the personal, private worthiness interview. Of course, this is not all. He will need to be taught the principles of leadership from other wise and understanding adult leaders. Here again, the adult leaders' responsibility is not just Sunday morning. It carries over into all church participation. As the boys participate in Scouting, they find the same adult and peer leaders as they saw in priesthood meeting Sunday morning. In other words, they find that priesthood responsibility goes far beyond the Sunday morning priesthood meeting.

Growth through experience

It is important that adult leaders create an environment that will permit these young men to learn and grow through experience. All too often we adults are impatient to get things done; so rather than letting these young men do them, we do them ourselves. At the same time, it is important that we do not leave them to their own resources. The wise adult leader will be where he should be when he should be there so he can take advantage of teaching opportunities. This, of course, will require great patience, and much of the time he will be in the background. As President Lee used to counsel, he should be a coach and not a quarterback. There needs to be sensitive and wise balance between the youth peer leadership and the adult leadership.

Bishops, one of the most essential and important resources you have in the Aaronic Priesthood area of responsibility is the bishop's youth committee. The degree to which you organize and properly use this committee will in large measure determine your success as the president of the Aaronic Priesthood in your ward. This is where you can make these youth leaders feel that they are a vital part of this great Church. If you will listen to them carefully, you will learn of their needs. This is where, by your example, you can teach them correct principles of leadership in a most receptive setting.

Importance of individual

In all that we do, regardless of the programs and activities, the center of our interest must be the boy. Programs are useful only to the degree that they affect each individual boy's life for good. As bishops, you and I have been given responsibility in perhaps one of the most unusual periods of time in the history of mankind. The spirits of this generation of youth are some of

the most valiant to ever come forth. The fact that the Lord would give a revelation pertaining specifically to their generation would indicate this. I have the utmost confidence that if we, the presidents of the Aaronic Priesthood, will carry the mantle of our offices, we will be blessed to provide a stewardship that will enable these young men to rise above the things of the world and be young men of character, integrity, virtue, and faith. Recently I learned of a group of young people in whose lives a miracle is taking place. They are setting an example for the world to follow. About 3 percent of the students in a particular high school are members of the Church. A few months ago the school principal and superintendent, neither of whom are members, granted permission for these young people to have released time during the school day for seminary. This is the first high school in the entire state in which it is located that has given this permission. Just a few weeks ago, the stake president and bishop reported that the school officials are most impressed with and grateful for the good influence the Latter-day Saint students are having on the entire student body.

The lives and influences of these young people justify the faith the Lord has in this generation. With the proper guidance from you bishops, your counselors, the advisers, and quorum presidencies, a new high in leadership and devotion of the young men of the Church will be assured. This then will

surely further prepare the world for the second coming of the Savior and ultimately assist him in bringing "to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39.)

Responsibility to family

There is another responsibility you bishops have that transcends all others that I feel impelled to mention, and that is the responsibility to your families. A bishop's wife carries an unusual responsibility in the home. May I caution you to be extra sensitive to her needs. Remember President McKay's counsel, "No success can compensate for failure in the home." (*Conference Report*, April 1964, p. 5.)

The bishops' responsibilities are heavy. However, with proper delegation and careful organization of your time, it is possible to successfully discharge your responsibilities to your family, as well as to the Lord. May your wives and your children and all of the youth over whom you preside be blessed with your wise and sound stewardship, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Spencer W. Kimball

Bishop Victor L. Brown has just addressed us.

We will next hear from Elder Marion D. Hanks, Assistant to the Twelve Apostles.