

Rendering Assistance in the Lord's Way

Victor L. Brown

My dear brothers and sisters, it is a pleasure to meet again with you in the welfare services session of general conference. My theme this morning is "Rendering assistance in the Lord's own way." My purpose today is to point out again the resources that are available to each bishop to assist him in providing for the needs of his people and perhaps to give a little different emphasis to some of these resources than has been given in the past.

As we consider the resources available today, we should not forget some of the underlying guidelines from ancient times. As the prophet Alma records:

"And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted; and they did not wear costly apparel, yet they were neat and comely.

"And thus they did establish the affairs of the church; and thus they began to have continual peace again, notwithstanding all their persecutions. ...

"And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need." (Alma 1:27–28, 30.)

As we have been taught so often from the Doctrine and Covenants, the bishop is commanded to search after the poor to administer to their wants. This refers to more than those who are materially poor. It includes those who have emotional problems or are involved in the multitudinous human problems of living. This information comes to the bishop primarily through personal priesthood interviews and reports received from the Relief Society workers. Again, as we have been taught, the first responsibility to solve the problem rests with the individual, then his family; and after they have done all they can, the Church and its welfare services organization is called upon.

Recognizing these basic criteria, in the Church today we have an organization which is designed to minister in the Lord's own way to those who have needs. This system consists of six elements: first, the bishops storehouse system; second, production projects; third, local welfare services resource personnel; fourth, LDS Social Services; fifth, Deseret Industries; and finally, the Church Employment System. These resources are referred to as Church preparedness.

The bishops storehouse system is composed of physical storehouses and a transportation system. It is designed to receive, store, exchange, and distribute commodities provided through the consecration of the members of the Church.

The bishops storehouse system is not a commercial enterprise. The commodities contained therein are not for sale. They are available only to those the bishop designates as recipients and only through a bishops order filled out by the Relief Society president and signed by the bishop. As we look to the future, there will be many more

bishops storehouses organized throughout the Church. This will be done as the Church matures in the wards and stakes. It will be accomplished in an orderly manner according to plan. A very good example of what a bishops storehouse is and does is found in the one at Welfare Square in Salt Lake City. Anyone who is interested is most welcome to visit this storehouse at any time.

Most of those who work in the storehouse are recipients of commodities. There are a minimum number of full-time staff members. One example of what happens when the spirit of this program permeates the activity is that of a thirty-two-year-old man who came to the storehouse. He was unable to read or write or even to speak. He was deeply disturbed. He was accepted by the other workers with love and understanding and was trained to accomplish a simple task. He learned to become a stock boy, stocking the shelves with commodities. Because he could not read, the staff placed pictures on the boxes so that he could match pictures and properly stack the cartons on the shelves. Through their patience and love, this young man has gained the ability to keep the shelves properly stocked with the proper commodities. Part of his compensation is provided in food which he takes to his parents and other members of his family to help provide for their needs. The happiness and fulfillment shown by this handicapped person as he receives the food to take home is truly an inspiration to all others.

Where physical storehouses are not available, a cash system is used. In this case, the bishop signs an order filled out by the Relief Society president and has it presented to a local merchant with whom an advance agreement has been made. The cash to purchase these commodities comes from commodity production budget funds.

Welfare production projects provide most of the commodities that stock the bishops storehouses. These projects include grain, dairies, beef cattle, honey bee projects, row crops, orchards, and so forth. They also include the manufacturing of some nonfood commodities. When the Church is fully matured, each stake will participate in some way in producing those things that are processed and stored and distributed from bishops storehouses. For those of you who are concerned about acquiring and managing a production project, may I refer you to Bishop H. Burke Peterson's October 1976 welfare services session address.

There are some cash needs for such things as utilities and medical expenses. The cash for these needs comes from fast offerings. As has been taught for many years, the commodity assistance should be used before cash. Again, may we reemphasize the importance of teaching the law of the fast so that our people will be even more generous than they are now and not restrict themselves to the cost of two meals.

One of the inspiring aspects of welfare resources is the Welfare Services missionary program, where approximately 300 Welfare Services missionaries are serving in 39 missions of the Church. Their professional skills as they provide technical assistance to priesthood leaders cover such areas as agriculture, all areas of health maintenance, career development, and financial management. We continue to encourage all couples and single women of the Church who have skills in any of these or related areas to contact their bishop or stake president and make themselves available for this missionary service.

Now, as to LDS Social Services: This organization was established to help priesthood leaders assist members who have social-emotional needs. These agencies provide assistance in two main categories—licensed services and clinical services. Licensed services include those functions which are governed by law, such as adoptions, foster care, and Indian student placement. Clinical services include professional therapy for individuals and families.

In areas where LDS Social Services agencies do not exist, bishops should maintain a list of reputable professional

personnel who provide similar services and who conform to the standards of the Church. With regard to licensed services, priesthood leaders should be careful to conform to local, state, and federal laws when adoption, unwed parent, or foster care services are provided.

When professional counseling is being given, the bishop should remain close to the individual to be aware of progress being made or any additional problems.

A most touching letter was received recently from a mother expressing her appreciation for her bishop and for a social services worker who had provided assistance in her family. May I quote from that letter:

“The summer will be remembered as ‘the best thing that has happened to Roseanne and David to date’!

“As you know, life has presented both children with special problems, and my heart has ached as I have seen David withdraw from social situations, and Roseanne offend and lose friends in her effort to make them.

“There are those who can help with their physical problems—therapy for a boy and medication to help calm a hyperactive daughter—but where could I turn to find someone to understand and help with the resulting emotional problems?

“When my bishop suggested LDS day camp I thought, ‘Good! This will be a good summer for them and will solve my baby-sitting problem, since it is necessary for me to work.’ Those two benefits would have made me feel the money invested was worthwhile—but they were just the beginning. Before the summer was over, I saw my son insist on taking the lead in a difficult hike up the canyon. In the past he had been content to follow behind. I saw him ‘rappel’ down the side of a building with the use of a rope, and the look of self-pride as he exchanged smiles with his counselor cannot be bought. By the end of the summer Roseanne had learned to put her frustrations into words and will most often try to reason with me in reaching a solution. This is a new experience for us.

“Raising a hyperactive child is a lonely position to be in, because even though friends try to understand, they cannot and usually react as though the child has problems because she is spoiled. It has been great therapy for me to meet weekly with people who do understand.”

Deseret Industries facilities are generally located only where there are large concentrations of members of the Church. They are established to provide employment for those who are unemployable, such as the aged, the mentally or physically handicapped, and so forth. They are founded on the principles of thrift, giving, working, and sharing. As concentrations of members increase, we would encourage priesthood leaders to investigate thoroughly the establishment of Deseret Industries facilities.

And finally, employment: Employment responsibility rests largely with the priesthood quorum for the brethren and the Relief Society for the sisters. It is important that the system work smoothly and promptly if it is to bless the lives of those who need employment. In some areas where the employment problems are unusually high, full-time employment centers have been organized. This is done only to assist the quorum and the stake and ward welfare services committees carry out their assignment and should only be done with proper approval from headquarters.

With these properly functioning and operating resources, the bishops of the Church, along with the ward welfare services committees, should be able to accomplish the work assigned by the Lord in taking care of the poor and the needy. As we do this, we will indeed be following Alma’s counsel:

“And thus, in their prosperous circumstances, they did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, whether out of the church or in the church, having no respect to persons as to those who stood in need.

“And thus they did prosper. ...” (Alma 1:30–31.)

May we be blessed as the psalmist said: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor.” (Ps. 41:1.) In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Official Web site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
© 2013 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. All Rights Reserved