

The Role of the Stake Bishops Council in Welfare Services

L. Tom Perry

Of the Council of the Twelve



My brothers and sisters, how great it is to meet with you in general conference. I have been asked to discuss the role of the stake bishops council and its chairman. This council exists for a vital purpose, but I am not sure that we all recognize its significance and power to help build and facilitate the work of the Kingdom.

To put the stake bishops council in perspective, may I briefly review those stake meetings in which welfare matters are regularly treated. First, and perhaps foremost, is the stake welfare services committee meeting. Usually held just after stake executive committee meeting, the primary focuses of this meeting are *planning, training* of stake high council and Relief Society leaders who in turn train on the ward level, and *overall program coordination*.

Second is the monthly bishopric training session, where specific elements of all bishopric-related programs are taught; periodically Welfare Services principles, duties, and activities are treated.

Third is the stake bishops council meeting, which focuses primarily on operational matters. More than anything else, this is a business meeting in which the implementation of welfare services is reported on and analyzed and action decisions are made *to ensure that welfare principles are applied and benefiting members of the Church as the Lord intended*.

Let us look closely at this council. As you know, the council is made up of all bishops in a stake. One bishop is appointed as chairman by the stake presidency. Normally the chairman prepares the agenda and conducts council meetings under the direction of the stake presidency, which is given through personal priesthood interviews. He also represents all ward bishops on the stake welfare services committee. While no specific meeting frequency is set forth, this council should meet no less often than quarterly and, as circumstances dictate, it may well meet monthly.

The first responsibility of the stake bishops council is to make certain that the Lord's storehouse functions properly. Through the chairman, members of the council should regularly evaluate and report on the management and operation of the storehouse. Regardless of whether a bishop is served by a stake, a regional, or an area storehouse, he has a voice in storehouse matters through this council. Through stake and region bishops councils, bishops may make specific recommendations for improvement. They should ensure that the storehouse is adequately stocked, that quality standards are observed, that financial matters are properly

handled, and that the storehouse is clean and orderly. Periodically, the council chairman should arrange for the bishops to visit the storehouse and become familiar with its functioning and ensure that it is always treated and operated as a temporal temple.

Most important, the stake bishops council encourages uniformity in distribution practices by the bishops to those in need of assistance throughout the stake.

All this implies, of course, that bishops have a stewardship regarding the storehouse. When Harold B. Lee was president of the Pioneer Stake in the days of the depression, he organized a welfare committee and they built a storehouse. After completion, they dedicated the building. In this special meeting, President Lee gave the storehouse keys to the bishops and in substance said, “Brethren, here are the keys to the Lord’s storehouse. You now have a stewardship regarding the storehouse. We have done the work in getting it established. It is now your stewardship to watch and see that it provides quality commodities in a timely and proper fashion to care for the poor and the needy.”

The storehouse is the Lord’s storehouse. It serves the bishops in their role of caring for those in need. That is the concept of the storehouse. Each storehouse is a sacred temporal facility essential to the bishop’s efforts to care for those in need. While many of you do not have access to a storehouse, it is the doctrine of the Church that each bishop have a physical storehouse available from which he may draw goods. Working through proper priesthood channels and with the Welfare Services Department, you may receive assistance and direction in establishing a storehouse in your area.

The second responsibility of the stake bishops council is to help develop the annual commodity production budget and to provide the needed commodities according to the plan. The stake bishops council provides input regarding the commodities they anticipate will be required to meet the needs of each ward. Bishops then encourage ward members to serve on projects and work-related assignments. Work requests come to the bishopric. These are discussed and assigned in the ward welfare services committee meeting. Quorums organize quorum members and their families to provide labor on projects. Thereby commodities are produced to care for those in need.

The third responsibility of the stake bishops council is to advise and counsel with the stake presidency in the acquisition and management of production projects. The bishops are responsible to make known their opinions about the right kind of projects and the quality of products, whether they are ward, stake, or region projects. Regarding production projects, members of the bishops council should give their opinions on the following questions:

1. What are the estimated financial and time commitments required of ward members?
2. Will the project be accessible to the members?
3. Will the size and type of the project be suitable for ward members?

The stake welfare services committee has the primary stewardship for seeing that production projects are established according to the area master plan. But the bishops council should feel an obligation to provide valuable insight as to the relationship between the storehouse and the various production projects.

The fourth responsibility of the stake bishops council is to review fast offering donations and expenditures.

President Kimball has encouraged us to give a generous fast offering. The chairman, the council and the stake presidency should review all of the principles relating to both payment and use of these sacred funds. This meeting is the ideal time to ensure that this program is properly administered. The bishops have a responsibility to see that contributed funds are properly administered and that items from the storehouse and the Deseret Industries are always used before cash is spent outside the Lord's system.

Fifth, and most important, is the responsibility to see that members work to the extent of their ability for any Church assistance they receive. Fundamental to the gospel of Jesus Christ is the philosophy that men should earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow. The council chairman should encourage discussion of good examples of how this part of the Lord's assistance plan can function "in His own way."

A sixth responsibility of the bishops council is to provide training for bishops in specific welfare services matters: this may include how to fill out bishops orders; how to analyze the needs of members; how to evaluate family resources and know the extent to which the Church should provide assistance; how to utilize the ward Relief Society presidency to help needy members; and when and how to use fast offerings. Where applicable, the bishops should also receive detailed instruction regarding the employment system, the bishops storehouse system, production and processing projects, Welfare Services missionaries, health resources, LDS Social Services, and Deseret Industries so they will know how to make appropriate use of these resources to help those in need.

Stake presidencies have the obligation and duty to teach the principles of welfare services and to encourage bishops to carry the same message to the members. Love and service, work and self-reliance, stewardship and consecration, the provident living that comes from personal and family preparedness, caring for the poor and the needy—these are principles members must learn and practice if they would live celestial lives in a telestial world. These same teachings must come down through quorum leaders as well.

The stake bishops council, then, provides a tremendous forum wherein bishops may discuss and obtain counsel regarding stake and regional welfare operations and problems. At this meeting the bishops council chairman should inform, instruct, and inspire bishops in welfare matters.

With these six responsibilities in mind, it is easy for the chairman of the stake bishops council, under the direction of the stake president, to design a meaningful agenda for each stake bishops council meeting. In summary, these six responsibilities are:

1. Ensure that the Lord's storehouse functions properly .
2. Help develop the annual commodity production budget to provide needed commodities for the poor and the needy .
3. Advise and counsel with the stake presidency about the acquisition and management of production projects.
4. Receive instruction from the stake presidency and develop ways to teach ward members the law of the fast and ensure proper administration of these consecrated offerings.
5. Plan ways to see that members work to the extent of their ability for any Church assistance they receive.
6. Provide training for bishops in welfare services principles and programs.

I will always be grateful I had the opportunity of growing up with the welfare plan. My father was a bishop at the time of its beginning. He had a remarkable way of involving his family with him in his Church assignments. At an early, impressionable age I was taught the blessings of Church service.

I will always remember the dignity and patience he exhibited towards those in need. I particularly remember a little old man who had lost his wife and some of the soundness of his mind. My father not only filled the role of his bishop, but also that of his friend. To the family, however, this little old man was considered to be somewhat of a pest. When he would become lonely he would make his way to see my father. It didn't matter whether it was ten o'clock at night or five-thirty in the morning, Father would always welcome him into our home, give him some nourishment, and then he would drive him back to his place of residence.

I remember at his passing seeing Father reading a letter addressed to "My friend, Bishop Perry," as a final thank-you for taking an interest in his life when he was an old man. I saw the tears roll down my father's cheeks as he read the letter. It was then I think I recognized for the first time an understanding of the rewards of gospel service.

To all the Bishop Perrys there are in this world, I ask that the Lord's choicest blessings will always guide and attend you. May these special moments of sweet reward for service rendered in our Father in heaven's kingdom sustain you and support you in your great and noble callings, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.