

tivities, quorum advisers, and bishops have helped me learn to control my temper and use my excess energy in constructive ways. These things will help me while I am on a mission, after I am married, and after I become a parent.

I know that the Aaronic Priesthood and Young Men program works. It has worked in my life, and I have seen it work in the lives of other young men. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, Michael. This has been a tremendous thing for all of us.

It will be our pleasure to hear from Elder Robert L. Backman, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, who has been asked to explain how to organize an Aaronic Priesthood quorum for reactivation. He will be followed by Bishop H. Burke Peterson, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric.

Elder Robert L. Backman

President Kimball has declared, "The vitalizing of the Aaronic Priesthood Quorums and awakening of the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums will affirmatively affect all other programs in the Church."

How can we vitalize the Aaronic Priesthood quorum?

Consider the quorum

First, consider the source of the quorum itself.

Every priesthood holder has the sacred privilege of belonging to a quorum and has the right to activity in that quorum. We have no right to deny him that honor. Yet we do just that when we do not reach out to involve him.

When we contemplate the purposes for which priesthood quorums are organized—to provide a brotherhood, a service unit, and a school for learning the principles of the gospel and the responsibilities we have as priesthood bearers—we might well ask, Is our quorum properly organized and functioning?

Is the presidency in place, schooled in their duties, and aware of their responsibility to lead all of the young men in their age group? Is the presidency meeting weekly to plan and carry out a meaningful quorum activity program?

The *Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Guidebook* has been published to provide training materials for the quorum presidency and their adviser. Quorum advisers should teach the ten training sessions in the guidebook as part of the quorum presidency meetings, which should be held weekly.

As the presidency learns their duties, they will include the quorum members in planning and implementing the quorum program, including the activation of those who need special attention, using the active quorum members to apply positive peer pressure, surrounding the inactive with their protective love and concern.

To help in the activation process, the quorum presidency will assign particular quorum members to fellowship each inactive young man in a specific way and to make progress reports on the assignment. A wise quorum presidency will plan activities to appeal to all those in the quorum.

The quorum presidency will personally visit the homes of all the young men of quorum age.

Mark Peterson was ordained a deacon one Sunday last March. When the family returned from church, the telephone rang. It was the deacons president who asked for an appointment for the presidency of

the deacons quorum to visit with Mark and with his parents. The appointment was set. Promptly at the hour set, the doorbell rang. The members of the presidency stood on the porch, dressed in suits, white shirts, and ties, and each one carrying his scriptures.

Sitting down with Mark and his parents, they began with prayer, then handed an agenda to everyone there.

The president then opened the scriptures, having Mark and his father read those references which speak of the power of the Aaronic Priesthood, what it is, and the particular duties of a deacon.

The president then spoke about Mark's particular responsibilities and duties: how he should dress, how he should pass the sacrament, act as a messenger, collect fast offerings. And then they asked him if he had any questions.

At the end of the visit they welcomed him to the quorum and offered help whenever he needed it. As they left, Mark's eyes were as big as saucers. He said to his Dad: "They were awesome!"

Oh, that every Aaronic Priesthood quorum was a royal brotherhood where each member could say, "I have true brothers who care about me, who will protect me and sustain me, who think enough of me to correct me."

The right man as adviser

Second, what miracles the right man serving as an adviser can perform in the lives of the Aaronic Priesthood holders.

We have discovered that the nature and quality of a young man's relationship with his Aaronic Priesthood adviser is a potent predictor of many of the outcomes we desire in that young man's life. This relationship becomes increasingly important as young men advance through the priesthood. In fact, it is

the best predictor of the real religious feelings and experience for priest-age young men.

How vital it is to choose an adviser who can provide the hero image for our young men as they begin to assert their independence from father and family.

Our young men will respond almost overnight to a man who really shows he cares. But he must be left in his assignment long enough to build relationships, to gain the trust and confidence of the young men, to truly make them his friends.

The advisers need training to be effective.

Once again, the *Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Guidebook* provides information, material, and a timetable for such training to be given by the bishopric. Please see that this is done.

Bishop responsible for each young man

Third, the Lord has called the bishop to be the president of the Aaronic Priesthood. President Kimball has reminded the bishops that this is their first and foremost responsibility. All bearers of the Aaronic Priesthood should know that the Lord has assigned the bishop to be their champion and exemplar, that it should be safe for each of them to follow the bishop's example in every activity of his life.

As the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, the bishop has the responsibility to give his personal attention to each bearer of the Aaronic Priesthood. No young man in the ward should ever feel that he walks alone, that he is not wanted or needed. He should always know that his bishop is his fellow servant, approachable, empathetic, a confidant, his champion.

It is not enough for the bishop to meet his Aaronic Priesthood only in the confines of the Church. Our

bishops need to come out from behind the pulpit, take their ties off, and come to know their Aaronic Priesthood in real-life situations.

I have a dear friend who served as a very successful bishop. During his tenure, the stake president asked a boy and a girl from each ward to visit with him about their relationship with their bishop. During the conversation, the stake president asked, "If you had a serious problem in your life, would you take it to your bishop?" Most responded that they would not. And when he asked why, their response surprised him. They said, "Our bishop seems too righteous." To the credit of my friend, his youth replied: "Not our bishop."

The bishop's most positive impact on youth comes in informal settings, activities, Scouting, service projects, athletics—real-life settings where they get to know him as a man.

At a recent encampment planned and directed by stake and ward priesthood leaders, I asked a young man how he felt about his leaders. He responded: "I've always been scared around stake presidents and bishops. For some reason I always feel like I'm getting interviewed. But living in camp with them has helped me make friends with them. Next time I have an interview we'll have memories to talk about."

Note that the Lord called the bishop to personally serve as president of the priests quorum. By virtue of that presidency, the bishop holds the keys of that office, which may not be delegated to another. The Lord requires that the bishop become the friend of each priest, that he be sensitive to personal and group needs at all times, that there be a feeling of brotherhood and fellowship between him and his priests. No priest should ever go astray if the bishop, through the exercise of his keys of presidency, helped him hold on to the doctrines and practices of the Church.

In words carefully selected to impress upon a bishop the importance of his calling and appointment as president of the priests quorum, President David O. McKay said, "Bishop, what is your priests' quorum but an opportunity for you as president of that quorum to get these young men around you as your bodyguard, young men who crave the social atmosphere of the ward and whom you may lead in paths of honor, trustworthiness, and faith?"

Please, bishops, interview each priest at least twice a year, and each deacon and each teacher at least once a year, for worthiness and spiritual progress. Help him set goals, help teach him to understand the oath and covenant of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and help prepare him for a mission and for temple marriage. Include the inactive boys in these interviews and challenge them to participate actively in the quorum. See that your counselors interview those deacons and teachers at least once a year.

Personalize those interviews. Make them meaningful. Show you care. Those one-to-one, heart-to-heart opportunities are priceless in guiding our young men.

We are so anxious to have your great influence on the youth, and we can promise you that your mark will be on them for eternity if you demonstrate your love for them.

Plan balanced activities with a priesthood purpose

Fourth, the program of the Aaronic Priesthood quorum should not only provide opportunities for learning the doctrines of the Church in the classroom, but also for translating the doctrine into real-life experiences through balanced activities having a priesthood purpose. The *Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Guidebook* tells us how to plan effectively to have successful experiences.

All of the young men's activities should be an outgrowth of the quorum—quorum led, quorum planned.

It is important for these activities to be held regularly. Our Church handbooks request that each quorum have a weekly activity on a day other than Sunday. At least once a month a combined activity with the Young Women should be held. When these directions are followed, good habits are formed; but when activities are held sporadically or "as needed," the continuity essential for the success of the program is missing. Plan them well in advance, at least three months in advance, but preferably a year in advance. Careful calendaring and adequate planning will allow time to do things well and will be attractive to our youth.

Considering the many interests, skills, and personalities of our young men, it is imperative that you use all the resources available to reach every boy.

Among those resources, Scouting provides a tested, proven program for us to use in holding our young men close to the Church. It appeals to boys. Its trail to the Eagle rank helps a young man set worthwhile goals, then realize them. For some reason there is a direct correlation between young men who achieve the Eagle rank and those who serve missions.

In an area encampment held in Arizona this summer, an Eagle Scout banquet was held to honor 1,150 Eagle Scouts. During that banquet, every Eagle Scout committed himself to serving a mission.

Its camping, hiking, and high adventure provide marvelous opportunities for our young men to enjoy a man's experience with men, building wholesome relationships between youth and adult leaders, something that happens too seldom in our day. Becoming a man is more than chronological. It involves proving the young man's manhood, testing his

mettle, challenging the world, demonstrating he can accomplish more than he thought he was capable of. That is what builds character and manliness.

A small Scout began a fifty-mile hike in the mountains, laden down with a backpack he could hardly lift. As he struggled up the trail, he thought of giving up many times, yet carried on, successfully completing the hike. At the end of the trail, he stood in front of a framed map of the area, pointed his finger at the trail, and shouted, "I licked ya!"

How many young men have been converted to the Church through athletics, and how many more have been saved from inactivity through our sports programs? As our young men grow up, they tell us that team sports are the most popular activity in the Church. That doesn't mean unsupervised basketball on activity night. The sports program can be as broad as the interests of the young men: basketball, softball, volleyball, soccer, wrestling, boxing, cycling, swimming, tiddlywinks. Through sports we can appeal to the most inactive young men and, at the same time, build a spirit of brotherhood as quorum members learn to compete as a team.

Personalize activities to the young men

Some young men march to the beat of a different drum. Because they may not enjoy physical activity, as most do, they are often isolated from the group. I remember one young man, not much of an athlete, who excelled on the stage. In our ward plays and roadshows, we could always count on a stellar performance from Mike.

Later in his youth he directed a theater-in-the-round production in the ward. Today he teaches drama in a great university and is a faithful member of the Church. How easily

we could have lost him without that opportunity to be someone and to excel at something. Our cultural arts have been neglected in recent years, not intentionally, but when stakes and wards were given the liberty to choose their activities instead of being dictated to from Church headquarters—something made necessary by the worldwide growth of the Church—some took this as a signal that cultural arts were no longer to be promoted. The ward and stake activity committees are there to help our bishoprics, quorums, and Young Women classes carry out those cultural activities planned by the bishopric youth committee: music, drama, speech, dance. These again are as broad as the interests of the youth and a valuable resource in promoting activity and brotherhood in the Aaronic Priesthood quorums.

Service—the key to lasting happiness

Please give our young men the opportunity to stretch their souls in service. Too often we only entertain, leaving our young men in the role of spectators. They will grow as they are involved, and they will develop love for their fellowmen, at the same time forgetting their own weaknesses and frailties as they serve. The sooner our young men have experiences in meaningful service, the sooner they will understand their priesthood responsibilities and their own capacity to truly be their brother's keeper, and the sooner they will discover the key to lasting happiness. In service every quorum member will know that he is needed. Even the most inactive will respond to an invitation to bless someone's life.

All of these activities provide a wholesome environment where relationships can be cemented. Is this important? President David O. McKay reminded us, "The spirituality of a ward will be commensurate

with the activity of the youth of that ward."

Costs: use good judgment

I must say something about costs. Our presiding brethren have instructed us to be very careful how we spend the Saints' money. We who deal with the youth recognize that a good portion of stake and ward budgets, and much of the out-of-pocket Church expenses of our families, are related to youth activities such as athletics, Scouting, dances, plays, and youth conferences. They do cost money.

Yet it was never intended to do away with youth activities. If we do, we will be making a sad mistake. As President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke on the subject in general conference, he said: "We do not mean to be parsimonious. [That means stingy.] We mean to be judicious." I plead with you to weigh the worth of a young man against the dollar spent: use good judgment.

It is not necessary to spend a lot of money to meet the needs of our youth. Even a high adventure does not need to be an exotic, expensive trip. High adventures can be had close to home when well planned. Youth conferences need not be held in faraway places to serve their purposes. And what is wrong in letting our young men earn their money for Scouting, athletics, and other programs? They will learn some valuable lessons about the realities of life as they do.

Just before his death, Elder S. Dilworth Young appeared before our Young Men General Board and told us about the dangers of giving boys everything. He spread out in front of us patterns for making tents, backpacks, sleeping bags, stoves, cooking utensils; and then he talked about the pride and the growth experienced by his young men as they enjoyed building them for themselves.

As we use all the resources available to us to vitalize the Aaronic Priesthood quorums, we will be successful in reaching our young men. Further, we will be awakening the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums as these stalwart young men come of age, taking the oath and covenant of the Melchizedek Priesthood and transferring their faith, devotion, and loyalty to their elders quorums. And all the programs of the Church will be affirmatively affected.

Challenge: reactivate three quorum members

As the Presidency of the Young Men of the Church, we challenge you stake presidents, bishops, advisers and adult leaders, and quorum presidencies and quorum members: select three quorum members who are presently inactive. If the quorum is small, select three nonmembers on whom you will focus your efforts. Use every resource available to activate, convert, and involve these three young men in the next year—that's only one every four months. Three young men per quorum in the next year? That's not much from where you sit, but Churchwide we would have close to 100,000 young men active and participating in the

quorums who are now fumbling in darkness without the quorum.

As I was called to be the President of the Young Men of the Church, I was given the "challenge to provide a program which will prepare this generation of youth to meet the Savior when He comes." I pass that challenge on to all of you, adult leaders and young men, bearing my witness that this generation of youth is a royal generation with very special things to do. May God help all of us to give the time, attention, and tender, loving care we need to give, to prepare these noble young men for the rich adventures and the singular missions that lie ahead of them, I pray in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We have heard from Elder Robert L. Backman, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and President of the Young Men's organization of the Church.

Bishop H. Burke Peterson, First Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, will now speak to the subject of how a father's example of activity or inactivity is reflected in the lives of his sons.

Bishop H. Burke Peterson

Unforgettable lesson from taxi driver

My brethren of the priesthood, as an introduction to my thoughts tonight, I would like to tell of a great learning experience I had a few years ago while in a taxi going from downtown Washington, D.C., to the Dulles Airport. As you may know, it is not a short ride, so I engaged in a rather lengthy conversation with the driver.

I learned an unforgettable lesson

from this black man. He was a big fellow. He weighed at least 250 pounds. He said he was the father of three sons, that his oldest was fourteen. The father was a regular employee of the U.S. Postal Service, and to augment his income, he drove a taxi in the afternoon when he finished his postal shift. "But," said he, "I'm always home every evening for dinner."

I said, "Your wife must be an excellent cook."

"She is," he said. But that