

flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:11-12). He is our Savior, and when we have done all that we can, he will make up the difference, in his own way and in his own time. Of that I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

The Brethren have taught plain and precious truths about the gospel of Jesus Christ from this pulpit during this conference. I bear testimony that we have heard "the will of the Lord, . . . the mind of the Lord, . . . the word of the Lord, . . . the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (D&C 68:4).

As the Lord Himself said in His preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, "What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

We have missed the voices of President Benson, President Hunter, and Elder Ashton during this conference. I seek the help of the Lord because I want to teach an important principle with the same spirit and clarity as my Brethren have taught.

Councils in the Lord's church

God called a grand council in the premortal world to present His glorious plan for our eternal welfare. The Lord's church is organized with councils at every level, beginning with the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and extending to stake, ward, quorum, auxiliary, and family councils.

President Stephen L. Richards said: "The genius of our Church government is government through *councils*. . .

President Hinckley

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve has just spoken to us, and we shall now hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard, also of the Council of the Twelve.

I have had enough experience to know the value of councils. Hardly a day passes but that I see . . . God's wisdom, in creating councils . . . to govern his Kingdom. . . .

" . . . I have no hesitancy in giving you the assurance, if you will confer in council as you are expected to do, God will give you solutions to the problems that confront you" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, p. 86).

How councils should function

As a member of the Twelve, I serve on several general Church councils and committees. I meet regularly with the leaders of the auxiliaries. Together, we counsel, we search the scriptures, and pray for guidance as we strive to learn how the auxiliaries can more effectively bless and strengthen the members of the Church.

In many respects, general Church councils function much the same as stake and ward councils. All councils in the Church should encourage free and open discussion by conferring with one another and striving to have clear, concise communication. Councils should discuss objectives and concerns, with mutual understanding being the ultimate goal. Stake and ward councils are ideal settings for leaders of all organizations to converse together and strengthen one another. The primary focus of stake and ward council meetings should be coordinating activities and stewardship, not calendaring. In these meetings, priesthood and auxiliary leaders should

review together their responsibilities and find ways for Church programs to help members live the gospel in the home. Today individuals and families need wise and inspired help from the Church to combat the evils of the world.

Seek sisters' input in council meetings

In a recent council meeting with the presidencies of the women's auxiliaries, the sisters told me that very few women in the Church express any interest in wanting to hold the priesthood. But they do want to be heard and valued and want to make meaningful contributions to the stake or ward and its members that will serve the Lord and help accomplish the mission of the Church.

For example, not long ago we were talking about the worthiness of youth to serve missions. President Elaine Jack said, "You know, Elder Ballard, the sisters of the Church may have some good suggestions on how to better prepare the youth for missions if they were just asked. After all, you know, we *are* their mothers!" The sisters' suggestions can help equally regarding temple attendance and a host of other matters with which priesthood leaders may be struggling.

Brethren, please be sure you are seeking the vital input of the sisters in your council meetings. Encourage all council members to share their suggestions and ideas about how the stake or ward can be more effective in proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and redeeming the dead.

All council members should participate

Ideally all members of any Church or any family council should share their concerns and should suggest solutions based on gospel principles. I believe the Church and our families would be strengthened if stake presidents and bishops would use their council meet-

ings for finding answers to questions on how to improve sacrament meetings; how to improve reverence; how to focus on children; how to strengthen youth; how to help singles, including single parents; how to teach and fellowship investigators and new members; how to improve gospel teaching; and many similar issues.

During the last half of this year, we have been holding a special training meeting in conjunction with each stake conference to discuss the morality of our youth. Those who have been participating are members of stake and ward councils. Every question directed to me in the discussion period could be discussed most appropriately in a ward council meeting. Yet rarely do those asking the questions feel that they have had an opportunity in ward council meetings to raise their questions, voice their concerns, and offer their suggestions.

Create spiritual synergism in councils

In these perilous times we need the cooperative effort of men and women officers in the Church because absolute vigilance is required on the part of all who have been entrusted to help watch over the kingdom. We each have large individual responsibilities, but just as important is the responsibility we share with others to come together in council in a united effort to solve problems and bless all of our Church members. When we act in a united effort, we create spiritual synergism, which is increased effectiveness or achievement as a result of combined action or cooperation, the result of which is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The ancient moralist Aesop used to illustrate the strength of synergism by holding up one stick and asking for a volunteer among his listeners who thought he could break it. Of course, the volunteer was able to break one stick easily. Then Aesop would put more

sticks together until the volunteer was unable to break them. The moral to Aesop's demonstration was simple: Together we generate synergism, which makes us much stronger than when we stand alone.

No one should stand alone

God never intended that His children should stand alone. Children have parents, and parents have the Church, with the scriptures, living prophets and Apostles, and the Holy Ghost to help them understand proper principles and act upon those principles in fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

The Apostle Paul taught that the Savior organized the Church, complete with Apostles, prophets, and other officers and teachers, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Paul compared the members of the Church and their various responsibilities to the body:

"For the body is not one member, but many. . . .

"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him

"But now are they many members, yet but one body.

"And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. . . .

"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:14, 18, 20-21, 26).

The scriptures state clearly that while our respective callings may be different and may change from time to time, all callings are important to the operation of the Church. We need the priesthood quorums to assert themselves and fulfill their divinely man-

dated stewardship, just as we need the Relief Society, the Primary, the Young Women, the Sunday School, and the activities committees to perform their vital functions. And we need the officers and members of all of these inspired organizations to work together, assisting each other as needed for the benefit of individuals and families.

Suggestions for more effective councils

This is not man's work or woman's work; it is *all* God's work, which is centered on the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have some specific suggestions that, if followed, I believe can help us be more effective with our families and in our Church callings.

First, focus on fundamentals. We have certainly been taught about these fundamentals during this conference. Those who teach must make sure the doctrine remains pure and that it is taught. Teach by the Spirit, using the scriptures and the approved curriculum. *Do not* introduce or dwell on speculative and questionable topics. Study the teachings of this conference in family home evenings and in family discussions; they will strengthen your homes. In a world that is filled with sin, conflict, and confusion, we can find peace and safety in knowing and living the revealed truths of the gospel.

Second, focus on people. Coordination and calendaring have their time and place, but too many council meetings begin and end there. Rather than reciting a litany of organizational plans and reports, spend most of the time in council meetings reviewing the needs of individual members. In doing so, confidentiality is critical. Council members must hold all matters discussed in council meetings in strict confidence.

Third, promote free and open expression. Such expression is essential if we are to achieve the purpose of councils. Leaders and parents should establish a climate that is conducive to openness,

where every person is important and every opinion valued. The Lord admonished, "Let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when *all* have spoken that *all* may be edified" (D&C 88:122; italics added). Leaders should provide adequate time for council meetings and should remember that councils are for leaders to listen at least as much as they speak.

Fourth, participation is a privilege. With that privilege comes responsibility—responsibility to work within the parameters of the organization, to be prepared, to share, to advocate vigorously the position you believe to be right. But just as important is the responsibility to support and sustain the final decision of the council leader, even if you do not agree fully.

President David O. McKay told of a meeting of the Council of the Twelve Apostles where a question of grave importance was discussed. He and the other Apostles felt strongly about a certain course of action that should be taken, and they were prepared to share their feelings in a meeting with the First Presidency. To their surprise, President Joseph F. Smith did not ask for their opinion in the matter, as was his custom. Rather, "he arose and said, 'This is what the Lord wants.'

"While it was not wholly in harmony with what he had decided," President McKay wrote, "the President of the Twelve . . . was the first on his feet to say, 'Brethren, I move that that becomes the opinion and judgment of this Council.'

"'Second the motion,' said another, and it was unanimous. Six months did not pass before the wisdom of that leader was demonstrated" (*Gospel Ideals* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], p. 264).

When a council leader reaches a decision, the council members should sustain it wholeheartedly.

Fifth, lead with love. Jesus taught that the first and greatest command-

ment in the law is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37, 39).

Priesthood leaders are to lead with "persuasion, . . . long-suffering, . . . gentleness and meekness, . . . love unfeigned; . . . kindness, and pure knowledge" (D&C 121:41-42). Those are the principles that should guide us in our relationships as neighbors in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Those who hold the priesthood must never forget that they have no right to wield priesthood authority like a club over the heads of others in the family or in Church callings. The Lord told Joseph Smith that "when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" (D&C 121:37).

In other words, any man who claims the special powers of heaven for his own selfish purposes and seeks to use the priesthood in any degree of unrighteousness in the Church or in the home simply does not understand the nature of his authority. Priesthood is for service, not servitude; compassion, not compulsion; caring, not control. Those who think otherwise are operating outside the parameters of priesthood authority.

Thankfully, most of our fathers and priesthood officers lead with love, just as most of our mothers and auxiliary leaders do. Leadership based on love brings incredible power. It is real, and it generates lasting results in the lives of our Father's children.

Achieve inspired consensus and unity

May God bless you, brothers and sisters, to find inspired consensus and unity as you counsel together in your service one to another. Only in so doing can the Church and our families begin to approach their full potential for doing good among the children of God on earth.

I know God lives and Jesus is the Christ. I know we can accomplish their work better through unity and love as we sit in council one with another. May we

be blessed to so do is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Twelve has just spoken to us. We note it is warm in here. We're sorry. You're not nearly as warm as you will be if you don't repent!

Sister Virginia H. Pearce, first counselor in the General Young Women Presidency, will now address us.

Sister Virginia H. Pearce

Blessings of participating in groups

It is good to gather in this inspiring setting in the presence of thousands and thousands who are brought together through the satellite network. I believe that Heavenly Father recognized that even though our relationship with him and our accountability to him are intensely personal, we gather strength when we meet in groups. We need to be reminded often that we are a part of something big and grand as we continue to do our own part. Each Sunday in gatherings around the world, young women stand and say aloud together, not "I," but "*We* are daughters of our Heavenly Father who loves *us*, and we love him. *We* will 'stand as witnesses,' " and so on (Young Women Theme, *Young Women Leadership Handbook* [1992], p. 4; italics added).

The ward family provides a safety net

Learning in groups is so important that Heavenly Father planned for us to be born into a group—the most basic, most hallowed, and most powerful group on earth: the family. We have heard good counsel about the family in these past two days. I would like to build on that by talking about the *ward* or *branch*

family—the basic ecclesiastical unit to which we all belong as members of the Church of Jesus Christ. For simplicity this afternoon, I will use the word *ward* to include both wards and branches, since they both serve the same purposes.

Wards are not designed to replace the family unit but to support the family and its righteous teachings. A ward is another place where there is enough commitment and energy to form a sort of "safety net" family for each of us when our families cannot or do not provide all of the teaching and growing experiences we need to return to Heavenly Father.

It is my desire and prayer that during the next few minutes we will expand our appreciation of the power of the ward family and renew our commitment to participate positively in that community of Saints.

A sense of belonging

First, ward families provide a sense of belonging. Robert Frost said in his narrative poem "The Death of the Hired Man":

Home is the place where, when you
have to go there,
They have to take you in.