

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

"Bishop, help!"

My brothers and sisters, I begin by sharing an event from a large ward in Provo about 20 years ago. During a sacrament meeting, a little boy made a big disturbance. After several minutes of trying to quiet this noisy three-year-old, the mother desperately handed him to the father, who was seated on the aisle close to the front of the chapel. By this time the noise distracted the speaker and audience, and everyone was very conscious of the parents' plight. The father's patience was much shorter than the mother's. In a few moments he put the little boy over his shoulder, stood up, and started for the back door. Looking back over his father's shoulder and sensing his determined steps, the little boy became quiet and apprehensive. Just as the father approached the rear door of the chapel, the little fellow reached his arms out toward the stand and shouted, "Bishop, help!"

There are times in the lives of all of us when we must reach out to our bishop or his counselors for help. Perhaps we need inspired counsel and direction to help with our families or our occupations. Perhaps we seek increased understanding of the gospel or the duties of our callings. We may need temporal assistance in a time of stress. We may even reach out for discipline to assist us in getting back on the path of growth. Always we benefit from their stalwart examples. Thank heaven for faithful and inspired bishops and branch presidents and their counselors!

Duties of the bishopric

A bishop (or branch president) has many duties. As the president of the Aaronic Priesthood, he personally oversees the programs and activities of the young men and young women in the

ward. He and his counselors interview each one each year. They give special attention to teaching correct principles. Always they encourage our youth to prepare for the covenants they will make in the temple.

As the presiding high priest, the bishop gives direction to all quorums, auxiliaries, activities, and programs in the ward. Calls to ward positions are under his direction. So are home teaching and visiting teaching, and the performing of ordinances like baptism. Assisted in all of this by his counselors, he is responsible for sacrament meeting and for the teaching of the gospel in all classes in the ward. The bishopric also directs all of the other meetings of the ward, including the priesthood executive committee and the ward council.

The bishopric is also responsible for monitoring the Church-service time of all ward members serving under their direction. Knowing the circumstances of the ward, they determine the appropriate balance of ward meetings and activities and the time remaining for families. They are also conscious of the purpose of our Sunday consolidated meeting schedule, which was not established to give time for more Sabbath meetings but to allow increased time for families to be together and for individual gospel study and service.

The bishopric (or branch presidency) is also in charge of unit finances. They receive tithes and offerings, oversee the unit budget and expenditures, remit funds, and see that records are properly kept. The bishop is the judge who determines how Church commodities and funds are used to provide for the temporal needs of the members. He is also responsible for seeking out the poor and the needy.

The bishop is the judge and the shepherd who has the power of discern-

ment and the right to revelation and inspiration for the guidance of the flock. He is responsible for holding worthiness interviews in order to authorize attendance at the temple, callings to ward positions, ordinations to priesthood offices, and the callings of missionaries. He administers formal and informal discipline for violation of the laws of the Church, and he counsels and helps members avoid the necessity for discipline.

Although some of their duties cannot be delegated, in most of these tasks the bishop and his counselors need the assistance of many others working under their direction: executive secretary, clerks, presidencies and group leadership of quorums, presidencies of auxiliaries, and officers and teachers. A bishop needs to be a skillful delegator, or he will be crushed under the burden of his responsibilities or frustrated at seeing so many of them unfilled.

I marvel at the work of our bishops and branch presidents. In my lifetime, our family has had many bishops. We have loved each of them and their counselors, and we have felt their love and assistance in our lives. Each of them was different in his personality, but each was a devoted servant of the Lord. I have seen the mantle of responsibility increase their stature, and I have rejoiced in their magnificent service to the people. God bless the bishops and bishoprics of this Church!

Bishops seek to unify the flock

There is something else we should mention about bishops. They are not specialists. We do not have bishops whose sole attentions are directed toward the youth, the aged, the married, the abused, or any particular occupational or ethnic group. Under the revelations of the Lord and the directions of His prophets, a bishop is ordained and set apart to preside over a ward whose

boundaries are geographic and whose membership includes all who reside there. For this reason, a bishop looks after the old and the young, the married and the single, the rich and the poor, the active and the less active. In this he seeks to unify the flock so that we may be taught and serve in groups of Saints that transcend considerations of age, marital status, ancestry, and economic condition. Our bishops lead us all in our efforts to follow the Savior's commandment to "be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27).

The Lord speaks through His servants

The Lord told the early members of His Church that the voice of His servants is the voice of the Lord, and that the hand of His servants is the hand of the Lord (see D&C 1:38; 36:2). I testify to the truthfulness of that principle, which imposes a solemn duty upon the members of this Church to be loyal to their leaders and faithful in following their direction. I affirm that the Lord will bless us for doing so. That principle also imposes a great responsibility on the holders of office in this Church. Leaders must assure that they exercise their sacred authority "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" (D&C 121:41).

We now have over 15,000 bishops and over 8,000 branch presidents in this Church. When we count their counselors, the total serving in bishoprics and branch presidencies is over 65,000. We praise and honor these worthy shepherds of the flock, judges in Israel, leaders and teachers of the people, men who love and are loved by those whom they serve as undershepherds of the Lord Jesus Christ. God bless these good men! And God bless their faithful wives, whose loyalty and support make their service possible.

“Help the bishop!”

As I began this talk, I quoted the words of a three-year-old who called, “Bishop, help!” I will now reverse those words and make them a challenge for each of us: “Help the bishop!”

Our current circumstances are different from those experienced by bishops and their counselors and members in earlier times. Today we have local leaders in most parts of the world. Many geographic wards and branches are in large cities and include hundreds of thousands or even millions of people. Some bishops travel during the week or commute long hours and great distances to work, effectively isolated from their families and their members for most of the hours of the week. Nevertheless, we also have communication and transportation resources undreamed of in earlier times. Whatever the physical changes over time, the nature of our local leaders’ callings has not changed, nor has their compensation. They are totally uncompensated by the coin of mortality. For the reward of their labors, all rely on the Lord’s deferred compensation plan.

Unchanged also is the fact that as they struggle with the heavy duties of their callings, bishops and their counselors must also earn a living and fulfill other family responsibilities. They do this not only because of their love for their wife and children, but also because they are responsible for being role models for the members of their flock. The burden is a heavy one that cannot be fulfilled without the supportive efforts of ward officers and members.

Fulfill callings diligently

How do we help? To lighten the load of the bishopric, auxiliary presidencies and Melchizedek Priesthood quorum presidencies and group leaders need to exercise initiative and fully function in the great responsibilities of their

callings. Bishops are responsible to call; they should not be required to beg or push. All of us should accept the callings we are given and serve in all diligence. The most common calling received for men is home teacher and for women is Relief Society visiting teacher. When properly performed, these vital callings can substantially lighten the load of the bishopric. Home teachers and visiting teachers are the eyes and ears and hands of the bishop. Brothers and sisters, help the bishop and his counselors by reliable, faithful performance of your visits and oversight as home teachers and visiting teachers.

Provide for ourselves and our families

Each of us should do all that we can, in the spirit of gospel self-reliance, to provide for ourselves and our families in a temporal and a spiritual way. Then, if it is necessary to reach out for help, we know we have first done all that we can. This includes helping the members of our immediate and extended families to the maximum extent possible so that the bishop is not faced with burdens that should be handled in the first instance by the individual or by the extended family.

Be considerate of leaders’ time

Another way to help our busy bishops and their counselors is to be careful not to occupy their time with matters that others can handle. If we need an address or a phone number or help with some other routine task, we should not call a member of the bishopric. Let us reserve their time for the heavy responsibilities that are uniquely theirs. Let us call on others for the things others can handle.

When contacting our local leaders is necessary, we should remember that they have employment responsibilities too. Don’t contact them at their place of work unless there is a true emergency.

Let us be careful not to put our leaders' employment in jeopardy. Members should also be careful not to expect their local leaders to give them the products of those leaders' occupations. Our leaders are called to give us Church service, not professional services or merchandise inventories.

We should remember that our leaders are also husbands and fathers. They are bishops or counselors for a season, but they will never be released from their family responsibilities, which are for eternity. Our leaders need time to perform their family responsibilities also, and our thoughtful consideration will help.

My heart ached for a young mother who wondered what would necessitate her bishop-husband's spending six hours counseling a needy member on a Sunday following sacrament meeting. He did not arrive home until 6:00 P.M., which is bad enough, but this particular Sunday happened to be Christmas Day. I am sure the bishop felt he needed to give the help that was requested, but I also wonder whether a member in distress could not have held some of that need in abeyance long enough for a bishop to enjoy this Christmas afternoon with his family. That is admittedly an extreme example, but the problem is not an exceptional one, as many bishops and their wives would affirm.

A more familiar example was mentioned in a ward I recently attended in Salt Lake City. A wife of a member of

the bishopric was speaking in sacrament meeting. She thanked the members of the ward for not phoning their home on Monday evening. She said that was the only time in the week when she and her children could plan to have their husband and father all to themselves. That forbearance would be good for all wards and branches.

The offices of the bishopric are sacred

Brothers and sisters, the offices of bishop and branch president and counselors are sacred in this Church. The men who hold those offices are respected by the Lord, inspired by His Spirit, and given the powers of discernment necessary to their office. We honor and love them, and we show this by our consideration for them.

I testify of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose Church this is and whose servants they are. I ask the blessings of the Lord on the members and leaders of this Church, general and local, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Faust

We have just listened to Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Henry B. Eyring, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will be our next speaker. He will be followed by Elder Monte J. Brough, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

The Savior wants to lead us to safety

The Savior has always been the protector of those who would accept His protection. He has said more than once, "How oft would I have gathered you as

a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not" (3 Nephi 10:5).

The Lord expressed the same lament in our own dispensation after describing the many ways in which He calls us to safety: