

The Elders Quorum

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By Elder D. Todd Christofferson
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Having one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum in a ward unifies priesthood holders to accomplish all aspects of the work of salvation.

Not long after the Church was organized in this last dispensation, the Lord stated in a revelation, “And by the prayer of your faith ye shall receive my law, that ye may know how to govern my church and have all things right before me.”¹ This principle has been followed in the Church—and that promise has been honored by the Lord—ever since. Patterns for priesthood organization and service have been revealed from time to time, beginning with the Prophet Joseph Smith when priesthood offices and quorums were established in our day. Significant refinements were revealed and implemented during the tenures of Presidents Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Spencer W. Kimball, among others, with respect to the Quorum of the Twelve, the Seventy, high priests, and other offices and quorums in both the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthoods.² Now, in a historic statement just moments ago, President Russell M. Nelson announced a further crucial adjustment.

If I may repeat some of his statement: “Tonight we announce a significant restructuring of our Melchizedek Priesthood quorums to accomplish the work of the Lord more effectively. *In each ward, the high priests and the elders will now be combined into one elders quorum ... [and] the composition of [the stake high priests] quorum will be based on current priesthood callings.*”

President Nelson added:

“These modifications have been under study for many months. We have felt a pressing need to improve the way we care for our members. ... To do that better, we need to strengthen our priesthood quorums to give greater direction to the ministering of love and support that the Lord intends for His Saints.

“These adjustments are inspired of the Lord. As we implement them, we will be even more effective than we have ever been previously.”³

At the First Presidency’s direction, Elder Ronald A. Rasband and I will add some detail that we trust will respond to questions you may have.

Elders and High Priests Quorums

First, to reiterate, what are the adjustments for ward high priests groups and elders quorums? In wards, members of elders quorums and high priests groups will now be combined into one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum with one quorum presidency. This quorum, increased in numbers and unity, will be designated the “elders quorum.” High priests groups are

discontinued. The elders quorum includes all elders and prospective elders in the ward as well as high priests who *are not* currently serving in the bishopric, in the stake presidency, on the high council, or as functioning patriarchs. The high priests quorum in the stake will be composed of those high priests who *are* serving in the stake presidency, in bishoprics, on the high council, and as functioning patriarchs.

The Elders Quorum Presidency

How is the presidency of the elders quorum to be organized? The stake presidency will release current high priests group leaderships and elders quorum presidencies and will call a new elders quorum president and counselors in each ward. The new elders quorum presidency may include elders and high priests, of varying ages and experience, serving together in one quorum presidency. An elder or a high priest may serve as the quorum president or as a counselor in the presidency. This is not a “takeover” of elders quorums by high priests. We expect elders and high priests to work together in any combination in the quorum presidency and in quorum service. These quorum adjustments should be implemented as soon as conveniently possible.

Priesthood Offices in the Elders Quorum

Does this adjustment in quorum structure change the priesthood office held by quorum members? No, this action does not rescind any priesthood office to which any quorum member may have been ordained in the past. As you know, a man may be ordained to different priesthood offices over his lifetime, and he does not lose or forfeit any prior ordination when he receives a new one. While in some instances a priesthood bearer may serve in more than one office at a time, as when a high priest also serves as a patriarch or as a bishop, he typically does not function in all his priesthood offices at the same time. Bishops and Seventies, for instance, do not actively serve in those offices once they are released or made emeritus. Thus, whatever other priesthood office or offices a man may hold, while he is a member of the elders quorum, he serves as an elder.

Years ago, President Boyd K. Packer observed that “the priesthood is greater than any of its offices. ... The priesthood is not divisible. An elder holds as much priesthood as an Apostle. (See D&C 20:38.) When a man [has the priesthood conferred upon him], he receives all of it. However, there are offices within the priesthood—divisions of authority and responsibility. ... Sometimes one office is spoken of as being ‘higher than’ or ‘lower than’ another office. Rather than ‘higher’ or ‘lower,’ offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood represent different areas of service.”⁴ Brethren, I devoutly hope that we will no longer speak in terms of being “advanced” to another office in the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Elders will continue to be ordained high priests when they are called to a stake presidency, high council, or bishopric—or at other times as determined by the stake president through prayerful consideration and inspiration. When their terms of service in a stake presidency, high council, or bishopric are completed, high priests will rejoin the elders quorum in their ward.

Direction for the Elders Quorum President

Who directs the work of the elders quorum president? The stake president presides over the Melchizedek Priesthood in his stake. Therefore, the elders quorum president is directly responsible to the stake president, who provides training and guidance from the stake presidency and through the high council. The bishop, as the presiding high priest in the ward, also meets regularly with the elders quorum president. The bishop counsels with him and gives appropriate direction regarding how best to serve and bless ward members, working in harmony with all ward organizations.⁵

The Purpose of These Changes

What are the purposes of the adjustments to Melchizedek Priesthood quorums? Having one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum in a ward unifies priesthood holders to accomplish all aspects of the work of salvation, including the temple and family history work previously coordinated by the high priests groups. It allows quorum members of all ages and backgrounds to benefit from the perspective and experience of one another and of those in different stages of life. It also provides additional opportunities for experienced priesthood holders to mentor others, including prospective elders, new members, young adults, and those returning to Church activity. I cannot adequately express how excited I am to contemplate the increasingly vital role that elders quorums will play in the future. The wisdom, experience, capacity, and strength that will be found in these quorums portend a new day and a new standard of priesthood service across the Church.

Twenty years ago in general conference, I related a story first told by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the Seventy that I believe bears repeating here.

In 1918 Brother George Goates was a farmer who raised sugar beets in Lehi, Utah. Winter came early that year and froze much of his beet crop in the ground. For George and his young son Francis, the harvest was slow and difficult. Meanwhile, an influenza epidemic was raging. The dreaded disease claimed the lives of George's son Charles and three of Charles's small children—two little girls and a boy. In the course of only six days, a grieving George Goates made three separate trips to Ogden, Utah, to bring the bodies home for burial. At the end of this terrible interlude, George and Francis hitched up their wagon and headed back to the beet field.

"[On the way] they passed wagon after wagon-load of beets being hauled to the factory and driven by neighborhood farmers. As they passed by, each driver would wave a greeting: 'Hi ya, Uncle George,' 'Sure sorry, George,' 'Tough break, George,' 'You've got a lot of friends, George.'

"On the last wagon was ... freckled-faced Jasper Rolfe. He waved a cheery greeting and called out: 'That's all of 'em, Uncle George.'

"[Brother Goates] turned to Francis and said: 'I wish it was all of ours.'

"When they arrived at the farm gate, Francis jumped down off the big red beet wagon and opened the gate as [his father] drove onto the field. [George] pulled up, stopped the team, ... and scanned the field. ... There wasn't a sugar beet on the whole field. Then it dawned upon him what Jasper Rolfe meant when he called out: 'That's all of 'em, Uncle George!'

"[George] got down off the wagon, picked up a handful of the rich, brown soil he loved so much, and then ... a beet top, and he looked for a moment at these symbols of his labor, as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Then [he] sat down on a pile of beet tops—this man who brought four of his loved ones home for burial in the course of only six days; made caskets, dug graves, and even helped with the burial clothing—this amazing man who never faltered, nor flinched, nor wavered throughout this agonizing ordeal—sat down on a pile of beet tops and sobbed like a little child.

"Then he arose, wiped his eyes, ... looked up at the sky, and said: 'Thanks, Father, for the elders of our ward.'"⁶

Yes, thanks be to God for the men of the priesthood and for the service they will yet render in lifting individuals and families and in establishing Zion.

The First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presidency of the Seventy have considered these adjustments over an extended period of time. With much prayer, careful study of the scriptural foundations of priesthood quorums, and confirmation that this is the Lord's will, we are moving forward with unanimity in what is in reality one more step in the unfolding of the Restoration. The Lord's direction is manifest, and I rejoice in it, as I bear witness of Him, His priesthood, and your ordinations in that priesthood, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.