

Behold! A Royal Army

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What a joy it will be for all Melchizedek Priesthood holders to have the blessing of teaching, learning, and serving shoulder to shoulder.

My beloved brethren of the priesthood, it is with great humility that I stand before you on this historic occasion, under assignment by our dear prophet and President, Russell M. Nelson. How I love and sustain this wonderful man of God and our new First Presidency. I add my witness to that of Elder D. Todd Christofferson and my other Brethren of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that the changes announced this evening are the will of the Lord.

As stated by President Nelson, this is a matter that has been prayerfully discussed and considered by the senior Brethren of the Church for a long time. The desire was to seek the Lord's will and strengthen the quorums of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Inspiration was received, and this evening our prophet made known the will of the Lord. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets!"¹ How blessed we are to have a living prophet today!

Throughout our life, Sister Rasband and I have traveled the world on various Church and professional assignments. I have seen nearly every type of unit configuration in the Church: a small branch in Russia where the number of Melchizedek Priesthood holders could be counted on one hand, a new and growing ward in Africa where both high priests and elders met as a single body because the overall number of Melchizedek Priesthood holders was low, and well-established wards where the number of elders required the dividing of their quorum into two quorums!

Everywhere we have gone, we have witnessed the hand of the Lord going before His servants, preparing the people and the way ahead so that all His children might be blessed according to their every need. Hasn't He promised that He "will go before [our] face" and "be on [our] right hand and on [our] left" and that His "Spirit shall be in [our] hearts, and [His] angels round about [us]"?²

Thinking about all of you, I am reminded of the hymn "Behold! A Royal Army."

*Behold! A royal army,
With banner, sword, and shield,
Is marching forth to conquer
On life's great battlefield.
Its ranks are filled with soldiers,
United, bold, and strong,
Who follow their Commander
And sing their joyful song.*³

Elder Christofferson has answered several questions that are certain to arise from the announcement that high priests groups and elders quorums, at the ward level, are being combined into one unified, mighty army of brethren of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

These adjustments will help elders quorums and Relief Societies harmonize their work. They will also simplify the quorum's coordination with the bishopric and ward council. And they allow the bishop to delegate more responsibilities to the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents so that the bishop and his counselors can focus on their primary duties—particularly presiding over the young women and the young men who bear the Aaronic Priesthood.

Changes in organizations and functions of the Church are not uncommon. In 1883 the Lord said to President John Taylor: “[Concerning] the management and organization of my Church and Priesthood ... I will reveal unto you, from time to time, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the future development and perfection of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom.”⁴

Now, a few words to you brethren who are high priests—know that we love you! Our Father in Heaven loves you! You are a great part of the royal army of the priesthood, and we cannot move this work forward without your goodness, service, experience, and righteousness. Alma taught that men are called to be high priests because of their exceeding faith and good works to teach and to minister to others.⁵ That experience is needed now perhaps more than ever.

In many wards, we may have high priests who are now going to have the opportunity to be presided over by an elder as their quorum president. We have a precedent of elders presiding over high priests: elders are currently serving as branch presidents in some regions of the world where high priests reside in the branch, and there are branches in which only an elders quorum is organized and high priests are present.

What a joy it will be for *all* Melchizedek Priesthood holders to have the blessing of teaching, learning, and serving shoulder to shoulder with all the members in their ward. Wherever you are and whatever your circumstances may be, we invite you prayerfully, faithfully, and joyfully to accept new opportunities to lead or to be led and to serve unitedly as a body of priesthood brethren.

I will now address additional matters which may need clarification as we move forward to implement the will of the Lord regarding the organization of His quorums of the holy priesthood.

What are the adjustments for a stake high priests quorum? Stake high priests quorums will continue to function. Stake presidencies will continue to serve as the presidency of the stake high priests quorum. However, as noted by Elder Christofferson, members of the stake high priests quorum will now consist of high priests *currently* serving in the stake presidency, as members of a ward bishopric, as members of the stake high council, and the functioning patriarch. Ward and stake clerks and executive secretaries are not members of the stake high priests quorum. When someone who is actively serving as a high priest, patriarch, Seventy, or Apostle is visiting a ward and desires to attend priesthood meeting, he will meet with the elders quorum.

As brethren in these callings are released in due course, they will return to their home units as members of the elders quorum.

What is the *role* of the stake high priests quorum? The stake presidency meets with members of the high priests quorum to counsel together, to testify, and to provide training. Stake meetings as outlined in our handbooks will continue with two adjustments:

One, wards and stakes will no longer hold priesthood executive committee meetings. If a special ward issue arises, such as a delicate family matter or an unusual welfare challenge, it could be addressed in an expanded bishopric meeting. Other less-sensitive matters can be addressed in the ward council. What has been known as the stake priesthood executive committee meeting will now be called the "high council meeting."

Two, the annual meeting of all ordained high priests in the stake will no longer be held. However, the stake presidency will continue to hold an annual meeting of the stake high priests quorum as has been announced today.

Can a ward have more than one elders quorum? The answer is yes. In the spirit of Doctrine and Covenants section 107, verse 89, when a ward has an unusually large number of active Melchizedek Priesthood bearers, leaders may organize more than one elders quorum. In such cases, each quorum should have a reasonable balance in terms of age, experience, and priesthood office and strength.

I testify that as we move forward with this inspired quorum restructuring in our wards and stakes, we will see a multitude of blessings. Let me cite just a few examples.

Under the direction of the bishop, more priesthood resources may assist with the work of salvation. This would include the gathering of Israel through temple and family history work, working with families and individuals in need, and helping the missionaries to bring souls to Jesus Christ.

As previous presiding leaders return to share their experience with the quorum of elders, a stronger quorum membership will result.

There will be a greater diversity of gifts and capacities within the quorum.

There will be more flexibility and availability to meet current and urgent needs within the ward and quorum and in fulfilling our various ministering assignments.

There will be an increase in mentoring and unity as a new elder and an experienced high priest share experiences, side by side, in quorum meetings and assignments.

Bishops and branch presidents will hopefully be liberated to magnify their callings to shepherd their flocks and to minister to those in need.

We understand that each ward and stake is different. While understanding these differences, we are hopeful that you will follow through with these changes promptly following this general conference. We have been given direction by a prophet of God! What a tremendous blessing and responsibility. Let us fulfill it with all righteousness and diligence!

I remind you: priesthood authority comes by way of setting apart and ordination, but real priesthood power, the power to act in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, can come only through righteous living.

The Lord declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Restoration:

“Behold, and lo, I will take care of your flocks, and will raise up elders and send unto them.

“Behold, I will hasten my work in its time.”⁶

Indeed, this is a time when the Lord is hastening His work.

Let us each use this opportunity to reflect and improve our lives to better align with His will so that we may deserve the many blessings He has promised to the true and faithful.

Brethren, thank you for all that you are doing to be a part of this magnificent work. May we go forward in this great and honored cause.

*Oh, when the war is ended,
When strife and conflicts cease,
When all are safely gathered
Within the vale of peace,
Before the King eternal,
That vast and mighty throng
Shall praise his name forever,
And this shall be their song:*

*Victory, victory,
Thru him that redeemed us!
Victory, victory,
Thru Jesus Christ, our Lord!
Victory, victory, victory,
Thru Jesus Christ, our Lord!*⁷

Today we all stand as witnesses of the Lord revealing His will through His prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. I testify that he is God’s prophet here on earth. I bear my witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our great Redeemer and Savior. This is His work, and this is His will, to which I bear solemn testimony in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.