

PRIESTHOOD COUNCILS: MINISTERING IN THE LORD'S WAY

Introduction

“Every convert needs three things: a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with the good word of God. It is our duty and opportunity to provide these things... Brethren, the loss of converts must stop. It is unnecessary. I am satisfied the Lord is not pleased with us... I invite you, every one of you, to make this a matter of priority in your administrative work... You have bishops and their ward councils... You are not bound by rigid rules. You have unlimited flexibility. You are entitled to answers to your prayers, to inspiration and revelation from the Lord dealing with this matter.” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, Satellite Broadcast, 21 Feb 1999)

Councils help stake and ward leadership adapt conventional Church government to better minister to single-adult members. To help meet the needs of our members, each ward may organize up to eleven councils as auxiliary councils to assist ward leaders. These councils provide opportunities for ward members to interact with each other and the individuals they serve. It opens the door for all to come unto Christ through service.

Leader's Responsibilities

“Your obligation is as serious in your sphere of responsibility as is my obligation in my sphere. No calling in this church is small or of little consequence. All of us in the pursuit of our duty touch the lives of others. To each of us in our respective responsibilities the Lord has said: ‘Wherefore, be faithful; stand in the office which I have appointed unto you; succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees’ (*Doctrine and Covenants 81:5*)” (President Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Is the Work of the Master”, *Ensign*, May 1995).

Bishopric

The bishop ensures every worthy ward member has a calling and changes callings every semester. The bishop meets in welfare meetings with the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents/presidencies and discusses the three-fold mission councils (see Page 4 of this handout.) and member's needs. He also calls and sets apart Relief Society presidents and chairs and/or co-chairs of these three councils. The bishop identifies the ward's vision, i.e., the direction the ward should take and how it will achieve that direction. The bishop leads the ward council in developing a theme for the semester based on ward needs.

Bishop's counselors have primary responsibility for the councils. This includes calling, setting apart and training chairs and co-chairs, attending council meetings as necessary and conducting stewardship interviews with the council chairs and co-chairs. Counselors explain the specific duties of each council to the chairs and co-chair and encourage them to quickly develop a program for the semester.

Elders Quorum and Relief Society Presidents

The elders quorum and Relief Society presidents consult with the brothers and sisters they have stewardship over to determine their needs and then assist them. Their counselors supervise home and visiting teaching and make contact with members that report to them. Contact by telephone and one-on-one visits should be made several times each month to every member supervised. The home and visiting teachers make their first visit by the 15th of the month.

Council Chair and Co-chair

Each chair and co-chair attends each ward council meeting. The chairs and co-chairs meet weekly with their council members. The chair presides but gives the co-chair opportunities to conduct. When conducting, the chair or co-chair uses the procedure as outlined in “How Councils Counsel

Together” on Page 4 of this handout. Only when all council members are involved is your council fully active and functioning.

Council Members

Each council should try to include at least one member from each elders quorum and Relief Society. More members may be called when the workload is heavy or more callings are needed. Each member attends a monthly ward council meeting and his or her weekly council meeting. Each council member should be involved, give input, and complete assignments.

Councils

Elder M. Russell Ballard wrote in his book *Counseling with Our Councils*, “One who is called to serve on a Church council should remember that his or her participation on the council is a privilege. And with that privilege comes responsibility—responsibility to work within the parameters of the organization, to be prepared, to share, to advocate vigorously the position he or she believes to be right. But just as important is the responsibility to support and sustain the final decision of the council leader. Furthermore, each council member has a responsibility to be spiritually in tune when taking part in council meetings so that he or she can make a positive contribution to the issues being discussed.”

Activities Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 10. Plans and organizes all major ward activities and dinners. Responsible for the sports program.

Community and Humanitarian Service Council

See Matthew 25:31-46 and Mosiah 2:17. Provides opportunities for ward members to participate in community and humanitarian service, utilizing the resources of organizations such as Church Humanitarian Services, United Way, and the Campus Service Office. Plans and organizes events sponsored by the ward and supports stake service activities.

Friendship Council

Promotes small group activities for ward members. Identifies those in the ward who need more social acceptance and creates ways to encourage them to become involved. Works to have all ward members know each other and to be friends.

Gospel Teaching and Leadership Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 16. The Sunday School President is the council chair. All Sunday School, elders quorum and Relief Society teachers are members of this council. The teacher improvement classes are taught weekly. The council also supervises ward prayer and sponsors Sunday firesides.

Home Evening Council

Organizes home evening groups and changes them periodically. One or two council members function as the home evening supervisor(s) for their assigned group. Everyone in the group should be given responsibilities during the weeks the group is together.

Institute Council

All members of this council should attend institute. Their responsibility is to identify all ward members who are not attending a CES religion class and encourage these members to attend a weekly institute class.

Missionary and Fellowship Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 7. Teaches the missionary preparation class. Fellowships new converts and less active members. Seeks opportunities to bring non-members to Christ through the Church.

Music Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 14. Oversees the music for all ward and auxiliary meetings. Selects hymns and special musical numbers with the bishopric’s approval. Organizes a ward choir. All musical personnel in the ward serve on this council.

Publicity Council

Organizes and publishes a ward directory. Maintains the ward bulletin board and ward

calendar. Prints and distributes sacrament meeting programs, provides greeters for sacrament meeting, and coordinates publicity for ward organizations and councils. Manages the ward website and encourages members to register for that site.

Spiritual and Temporal Welfare Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 8. Assists and teaches members to be spiritually and temporally self-reliant. Assists members needing employment or other financial needs. Assists in implementing the ward emergency plan.

Temple and Family History Council

See *General Handbook of Instructions, Book 2*, Section 9. Teaches the family history class and encourages family history research. Encourages members to go often to the temple and become temple workers if applicable. Ensures all members preparing to enter the temple attend the temple preparation classes.

Council Interaction

Councils exist to support the bishopric and elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies in bringing individuals to Christ and fulfilling member's needs. The bishopric and presidencies should rely on the councils to help carry out their goals for the semester. Councils are more effective when they coordinate their efforts with other councils or groups, working together to bring maximum benefit to ward members.

How Councils Work

A member of the bishopric calls and sets apart the chairs and co-chairs of the eleven councils. The Missionary and Fellowship, Temple and Family History, and Spiritual and Temporal Welfare Councils must have an elder as chair. Elders quorum and Relief Society presidents have stewardship over these three councils and should assign one elders quorum and Relief Society president to watch over each of these councils.

At the beginning of the semester, the bishop's counselors and elders quorum and Relief Society presidents meet with their assigned chairs and co-chairs to:

1. Explain and expand on each of their councils' specific duties and provide direction on what ward leaders would like to see accomplished during the semester.
2. Instruct the chairs and co-chairs to define a vision and then set goals with their council members to accomplish their vision which will most bless ward members.

The bishop's counselors and elders quorum and Relief Society presidents meet monthly with each assigned council chair and co-chair to check progress and offer guidance.

Ward Council—Key to Success

“In my view, the ward council meeting is one of the most important meetings in the Church, because priesthood quorum and auxiliary leaders can discuss and plan with the bishopric the work that is to be done during the coming month. Leaders can then personally interface with one another as often as necessary to assist in the accomplishment of the council's goals and objectives. Of all the councils and committees in the Church, I believe that the ward council can have the greatest impact in helping our Father's children.” (Elder M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils*, page 102)

Ward Council is an opportunity for the bishopric to model how a council meeting should function to help councils meet members' needs. There are several purposes for Ward Council:

1. Training.
2. Coordinating, calendaring and budgeting for ward events.
3. Providing an opportunity for councils, including council members, to return and report on their council's progress to the bishopric and other ward leaders.

4. Disseminating information concerning bishopric objectives and stake activities for ward correlation.
5. Counseling together regarding ward needs.

During the initial meetings, the bishopric should assign a budget to each group. All instructional material and manuals from the previous leaders should be given to the new leaders. Ward council meeting is held three times each month, with one third of the ward's councils invited to report at each meeting; therefore, each council, including its chair, co-chair and all council members, attends ward council once each month. Attendance also includes the bishopric, presidents of elders quorum and Relief Society, council chairs and co-chairs, an enrichment leader, the high councilor and the Relief Society specialist. The bishop presides at this meeting but his counselors, the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents, or others may conduct the meeting or portions of the meeting.

How Councils Counsel Together

Elder M. Russell Ballard wrote, "When more people feel ownership of the problem, more people are willing to become part of the solution." (*Counseling with Our Councils*, page 14)

1. The leader appoints a council member to record ideas. The leader presents a clear picture of the issue to be discussed.
2. The leader begins by asking questions and then actively listens as the council members respond. The leader generally does not answer questions that arise during discussion but redirects questions to council members for their response.
3. The council discusses the ideas presented by the council members.
4. The leader carefully considers the members' ideas and then listens to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit to help him/her make a decision. Though unanimity is the goal, the final decision remains with the council leader.
5. The leader then gives specific and clear assignments to council members. Members

of the council return and report at an appointed time.

The Three-fold Mission Councils

The elders quorum and Relief Society presidents oversee the Missionary and Fellowship, Spiritual and Temporal Welfare, and Temple and Family History Councils. With the approval of the bishop, these presidents meet with the chairs and co-chairs of these three councils to discuss ward needs, give direction and provide training. These meetings will be held monthly with the president of the first quorum of elders conducting and the high councilor and the Relief Society specialist attending as directed by the bishop. The purpose of these meetings is to help the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents achieve the mission of the Church by perfecting the saints, proclaiming the gospel, and redeeming the dead while being assisted by the three councils listed above.

Suggested Council Meeting Agenda

- Date:
- Presiding: (Name)
- Conducting: (Name)
- Opening Prayer: (Name)
- Spiritual Thought: (Name)
- Leadership Training (from scriptures, handbooks, or other Church materials)
- Counseling Together
- Closing prayer: (Name)

Leadership Guidelines for Leading Councils

(from Chapter 1 in Elder Ballard's book, "Counseling with our Councils")

1. An effective leader has a sense of vision.
2. An effective leader encourages free expression.
3. An effective leader respects the gift of agency.
4. An effective leader gives clear, precise instructions.
5. An effective leader works step by step.
6. An effective leader delegates.
7. An effective leader sets and example of hard work.
8. An effective leader teaches by precept and example.
9. An effective leader serves with love.
10. An effective leader can make a difference.