

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH 84150-1200

April 2, 2018

To: General Authorities; General Auxiliary Presidencies; Area Seventies; Stake, Mission, and District Presidents; Bishops and Branch Presidents; Stake and Ward Councils

(To be read in sacrament meeting)

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Ministering with Strengthened Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums and Relief Societies

The Savior's ministry exemplifies the two great commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37, 39). In that spirit, Jesus also taught, "Ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people" (3 Nephi 13:25).

To focus the efforts of Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies on ministering as the Savior taught, we announce the following adjustments:

- **At the ward level, one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum.** Members of elders quorums and high priests groups are now combined into one quorum with one presidency. The quorum is designated the "elders quorum," and ward high priests groups are discontinued.
- **At the stake level, one high priests quorum.** The stake presidency continues to serve as the presidency of the high priests quorum. Members of that quorum are only those high priests currently serving in the stake presidency, in bishoprics, on the high council, and as functioning patriarchs.
- **Ministering replaces home teaching and visiting teaching.** The separate programs of home teaching and visiting teaching are now a coordinated effort referred to as "ministering," overseen by the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies under the direction of the bishop. Ministering is Christlike caring for others and helping meet their spiritual and temporal needs.

April 2, 2018

Page 2

- **Including youth in ministering.** Ministering may include Laurels and Mia Maids as companions to Relief Society sisters, and priests and teachers continue as companions to Melchizedek Priesthood holders.

The quorum adjustments should be implemented promptly. The ministering adjustments may take some time but should be in place as soon as possible. Additional information is available at ministering.lds.org.

Sincerely yours,

Russell M. Nelson

Dallin H. Oaks

Henry B. Eyring

The First Presidency

Ministering with Strengthened Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums and Relief Societies

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Enclosure to the First Presidency letter dated April 2, 2018

Jesus’s life and ministry exemplify the two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). As members of the Savior’s Church truly desiring to be His disciples, we should follow His admonition to love and serve our Father in Heaven and His children. “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me,” the Savior said (D&C 42:29). King Benjamin taught, “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17). Alma summarized our duty by noting, “They did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness” (Mosiah 23:18).

To help each of us respond to the divine mandate to care for and serve others, the First Presidency has announced the following adjustments, designed to focus the efforts of Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies on ministering as the Savior did. These adjustments include the following:

- **At the ward level, one Melchizedek Priesthood quorum.**
- **At the stake level, one high priests quorum.**
- **Ministering replaces home teaching and visiting teaching.**
- **Including youth in ministering.**

In support of these adjustments, wards and stakes 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 could be addressed in the ward council. What have been called “stake priesthood executive committee meetings” are called “high council meetings” (see questions 7 and 15, below).

Additional information is available at ministering.lds.org.

At the Ward Level, One Melchizedek Priesthood Quorum

President Russell M. Nelson has taught that “revelation need not all come at once. It may be incremental.”¹ Unfolding events regarding priesthood quorums and a growing understanding of priesthood keys provide a pattern of incremental revelation. Throughout the Church’s history, the Lord has often revealed His will line upon line, progressively blessing His children with greater understanding of how to apply principles of the gospel to current conditions (see D&C 46:15–16).

Over a period of years, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have considered the adjustments described below. Only with much prayer, careful study of the scriptural foundation of priesthood quorums, unanimity of presiding Church leaders, and confirmation that

this is the Lord’s will, leaders have moved forward with the restructuring of quorums at the ward and stake level, making this one more step in the unfolding of the Restoration.

1. 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 quorum with one presidency. This quorum, increased by numbers and unity, will be designated the “elders quorum,” and the ward high priests group is discontinued.

The elders quorum includes all elders and prospective elders in the ward and high priests who are not currently serving in the bishopric, in the stake presidency, on the high council, or as functioning patriarchs.

2. How is the presidency of the elders quorum organized?

The stake president, assisted by his counselors, will release current high priests group leaderships and elders quorum presidencies. Then the stake president will call a new elders quorum president in each ward, and the stake president, an assigned counselor in the stake presidency, or an assigned high councilor will call the counselors recommended to serve in the elders quorum presidency. 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.²

3. Who directs the work of the elders quorum president?

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. (See *Handbook 2*, 7.3.1.)

4. Does this adjustment in quorum structure change the priesthood office held by quorum members?

No. Elders remain elders and high priests remain high priests in terms of their priesthood office. However, elders continue to be ordained high priests when they are called to a stake presidency, high council, or bishopric—or at other times determined by the stake president through prayerful consideration and inspiration.

5. Can a ward have more than one elders quorum?

Yes. In the spirit of Doctrine and Covenants 107:89, 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.

At the Stake Level, One High Priests Quorum

6. What are the adjustments for a stake high priests quorum?

The stake presidency continues to serve as the presidency of the stake high priests quorum. Members of that quorum are only those high priests currently serving in the stake presidency, in

bishoprics, on the high council, and as functioning patriarchs. Ward and stake clerks and executive secretaries are not members of the high priests quorum.

Members of the stake high priests quorum will generally meet with the elders quorum if not assigned elsewhere.

7. What is the role of a stake high priests quorum?

In their presiding role, the stake presidency meets as needed with the members of the stake high priests quorum to provide training and to assist quorum members in their callings. The existing stake meetings explained in *Handbook 2*, section 18.3 continue with the following adjustments:

- Stake priesthood executive committee meetings are called “high council meetings.”
- An annual meeting of all ordained high priests in the stake is no longer held. However, the stake presidency holds an annual meeting of the stake high priests quorum.

8. 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 temple and family history work previously coordinated by the high priests group leader. It allows quorum members of all ages and backgrounds to benefit from the perspective and experiences 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.

These adjustments help elders quorums and Relief Societies coordinate their work. They 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 he and his counselors can focus on their primary duties—particularly presiding over the Aaronic Priesthood and young women.

Ministering Replaces Home Teaching and Visiting Teaching

For many years, home teachers and visiting teachers have responded to assignments to visit the house of each member monthly, deliver a message, and help as needed. Countless hours of devoted and selfless service have been given in this great work.

Building on that devotion, Church leaders now ask members to increase their focus on Christlike caring for others, both spiritually and temporally (see *Handbook 2*, 3.2.3). To emphasize that caring, the former programs of home teaching and visiting teaching are now a common effort referred to as “ministering,” overseen by the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies under the direction of the bishop.

9. What is “ministering”?

The Savior showed by example what it means to minister as He served out of love for His Father and for each person (see John 15:9–10). He loved, taught, prayed for, comforted, and blessed those around Him, inviting all to follow Him (see Mark 8:34). As Church members minister, they prayerfully seek to serve as He would—to “comfort those that stand in need of comfort,” “watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them,” “visit the house of each member,” and help each become a true disciple of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 18:9; D&C 20:51, 53; see also John 13:35).

As members minister, they determine through communication and inspiration the frequency and type of contact they have with those to whom they give care. They counsel with and render an account to their leaders at least once a quarter regarding their service and the needs and strengths of those for whom they have been invited to care. Leaders report these ministering interviews each quarter; they no longer report the number of visits or contacts made to individuals and families. In addition, through a priesthood link to each member, ministering brothers and sisters form a communication network leaders may use in a time of danger or emergency.

10. What are those who minister called?

Priesthood holders are referred to as “ministering brothers,” and Relief Society sisters are referred to as “ministering sisters.” Generally, they will simply be called by their names: “Brother Jones” and “Sister Smith.” They are not referred to as “ministers.”

11. How is ministering similar to and different from home teaching and visiting teaching?

Ministering is similar to home teaching and visiting teaching in that each household will have priesthood brethren—ministering brothers—to minister to and care for the family or individuals who live there (see D&C 20:47, 59). Each adult sister will have members of the Relief Society—ministering sisters—to minister to and care for her, further reinforcing the emphasis on ministering shared by the Relief Society General Presidency beginning in January 2018 (see “Keep in Touch with Her Anytime, Anywhere, Any Way,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Jan. 2018, 7).

In addition, some requirements of home teaching and visiting teaching have been adjusted to help members minister with greater focus on meeting needs. No longer must contacts always be formal visits. They can take place at home, at church, or in any setting that is safe, convenient, and reachable. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught: “[What] matters most is how you have blessed and cared for those within your stewardship, which has virtually nothing to do with a specific calendar or a particular location. What matters is that you love your people and are fulfilling the commandment ‘to watch over the church always.’”³

In short, ministering is led by the Spirit, it is flexible, and it is customized to the needs of each member.

12. How is ministering led by the Spirit?

As members minister, they seek inspiration to know how best to reach out to others and meet their needs. Would a scheduled visit and regular phone calls to an older sister who lives alone provide the connection she needs? Would an invitation to a less-active young adult to participate in a community project be the most helpful contact? Would supporting a youth’s soccer game help both the youth and her parents? Would texting someone a hope-filled scripture help lighten his burdens? Would a note or card or email show helpful concern? What would the Savior have His servants do? Finding inspired answers to such questions and using all available methods for making contact with those they are assigned is central to inspired ministering. To provide Christlike service, ministering brothers and sisters cannot rely on routine visits or predetermined messages; they seek inspiration and counsel with family members to best care for those to whom they are assigned—using the time and resources they have.

13. How is ministering flexible?

Ministering brothers and sisters have the opportunity to do what works best. Those they are invited to care for may not each need an equal amount of attention. Working with the bishopric and ward

council, elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies communicate priorities to ministering brothers and sisters so they have a sense of who may need them most. Highest priority is most often given to new members, less-active members who may be receptive, and others such as single parents, widows, and widowers. Leaders may assign a youth leader to a family where a young man or young woman is experiencing challenges, and they immediately assign ministering brothers and sisters to new converts. They can assign any members of the elders quorum—high priests and elders—to such a ministry.

Where appropriate, a married couple may be assigned to a family or individual. In addition, Laurels and Mia Maids may make significant contributions by serving as companions to Relief Society sisters, as do priests and teachers by serving with Melchizedek Priesthood holders (see question 22, below).

14. How is ministering customized to the needs of each member?

Ministering brothers and sisters seek to do what best meets individual needs. Every form of communication is available to respond to the promptings of the Spirit and meet the needs of those they serve. Meeting those needs starts with prayerful consideration and with having an informative conversation with the families and individuals they are assigned. In that conversation and in subsequent contacts, they listen to those to whom they minister in order to understand how best to serve, the frequency and type of contact they desire, and the need for and content of messages they share. Those who minister ensure that all communication with any family member is appropriate.

Ministering brothers and sisters seek to help individuals and families prepare for their next ordinance, keep the covenants they have made, and become self-reliant. This help may include sharing spiritual messages tailored to an individual or family, though ministering is not principally a message-sharing assignment. The *Liahona* and *Ensign* will no longer include specific messages to be used in ministering contacts.

15. How do Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society leaders unify their work?

An enhanced ability to minister to others is one of the intended and natural outgrowths of the increased strength of restructured priesthood quorums and the resulting unity with Relief Society. Ministering becomes one coordinated effort to fulfill the priesthood duty to “visit the house of each member” and to “watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them” and the Relief Society purpose to “increase faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and His Atonement; strengthen individuals, families, and homes through ordinances and covenants; and work in unity to help those in need” (D&C 20:47, 53; *Handbook 2*, 9.1.1).

Working together and under the direction of the bishop, elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies have opportunities to be inspired, organized, and coordinated in seeking to watch over and care for each individual and family. Coordination includes working together in the following ways:

- Elders quorum presidencies recommend ministering assignments for the individuals and families of the ward. Relief Society presidencies recommend ministering assignments for Relief Society sisters. Where special needs exist, elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies may discuss specific assignments before they are finalized.
- Elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies recommend ministering assignments to the bishop for his approval.
- As needed, ministering brothers and sisters may discuss special circumstances of

individuals and, when necessary, contact their quorum or Relief Society leaders for additional help and resources.

- Elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies meet quarterly to discuss needs of individuals and families learned through ministering interviews.
- Following that meeting, elders quorum and Relief Society presidents together meet quarterly with the bishop to address the needs of individuals and families.
- As needed, elders quorum and Relief Society leaders counsel with the ward council regarding strengths and needs identified in ministering interviews and make and enact plans to serve and bless ward members.

To simplify coordination, wards focus on ward council meetings and no longer hold priesthood executive committee meetings. Agenda items previously handled in priesthood executive committee meetings are discussed, as needed, in expanded bishopric meetings, ward council, or quarterly meetings of the bishop, elders quorum president, and Relief Society president.

16. How do members receive their ministering assignment?

Leaders meet with ministering brothers and sisters—preferably as companionships—to share their assignments with them and to counsel about the strengths, needs, and challenges of those to whom they minister. This conversation could take place in a ministering interview (see question 20, below) or whenever needed.

17. What is the role of in-home visits?

Given numbers, distances, safety, and other considerations, a visit to every home every month may not be possible or practical; nevertheless, personal visits are important when they can be made. To serve as the Savior would, ministering brothers and sisters consider every possibility for care and contact with those they are assigned.

18. Does ministering always include sharing a message?

No. As ministering brothers and sisters come to know those they are assigned, they learn their needs and the Holy Ghost may prompt them to teach a gospel principle. A parent may also request a particular topic for his or her family. But the best “message” is care and compassion.

19. How do ministering brothers and sisters account for their efforts?

Leaders no longer gather reports of families and individuals who were visited during a given month. Instead, ministering brothers and sisters have an opportunity to counsel with their elders quorum and Relief Society leaders about the circumstances of those they serve and about their ongoing ministering efforts. This counseling together takes place at least quarterly in ministering interviews and any additional time when communication is necessary.

20. What is a ministering interview?

A ministering interview is held (1) to counsel about the strengths, needs, and challenges of assigned families and individuals, (2) to determine what needs the quorum, Relief Society, or ward council might assist with, and (3) to learn from leaders and be encouraged in ministering efforts.

At least quarterly, ministering brothers and sisters meet with a leader of the elders quorum or Relief Society in a ministering interview, preferably in person and with their companion. A married

couple ministering together can meet with either elders quorum or Relief Society leaders or both. Between interviews, ministering brothers and sisters communicate other information as needed—in person or through phone calls, texts, emails, or otherwise. They share confidential information only with the elders quorum or Relief Society president—or directly with the bishop.

21. How do leaders keep a record of ministering interviews?

Elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies keep a record of the interviews they hold with ministering brothers and sisters. Leaders indicate the month interviews are held and who participated in them. They report a companionship as interviewed if at least one member of the companionship is interviewed during the quarter.

By July 1, 2018, updates to the LDS Tools app and to Leader and Clerk Resources on LDS.org will be available for such reporting. Changes in the Quarterly Report will also be available mid-2018. More details for leaders and clerks will be provided in an upcoming notice from Church headquarters.

Including Youth in Ministering

22. How can youth be included in ministering assignments?

Leaders may choose to assign Laurels and Mia Maids as companions to Relief Society sisters, as priests and teachers are now assigned as companions to Melchizedek Priesthood holders. Youth share their unique gifts and grow spiritually as they serve alongside adults in the work of salvation and as they counsel about that service in ministering interviews. In addition, involving youth in ministering assignments increases the reach of caring for others by increasing the number of members who participate. It may also simplify and strengthen these efforts within families as mothers and daughters—and fathers and sons—serve together.

23. Should a youth have ministering brothers and/or sisters assigned specifically to him or her?

No. Young men and young women are ministered to by those who minister to their families and are also cared for by their Aaronic Priesthood and Young Women leaders.

The quorum adjustments should be implemented promptly. The ministering adjustments may take some time but should be in place as soon as possible. Additional information is available at ministering.lds.org.

Please note that references to wards and bishops apply to branches and branch presidents, references to stakes apply to districts, and references to stake presidents apply to mission and district presidents.

¹ Russell M. Nelson, “Ask, Seek, Knock,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 83.

² See Doctrine and Covenants 107:9–12. In verse 11, “the high priest” refers to a presiding high priest.

³ Jeffrey R. Holland, “Emissaries to the Church,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 62.