

hood office by making the high priest a political appointee of the state rather than a true and righteous descendant of Aaron. This political manipulation led to rival claimants to priesthood offices and authority, with particular opposition between the Sadducees of Jerusalem and the Essenes of Qumran.

CHRIST'S MINISTERS. John the Baptist was a priesthood bridge between the Old and New Testament periods. Being of priestly descent through both parents, he was a legal administrator of the LAW OF MOSES, yet he received additional blessings and keys to usher in Christ's ministry, being set apart to this power by an angel of God when he was eight days old (D&C 84:28).

As Jesus organized his Church, he established a religious order with new priesthood leaders. While he retained features of the earlier structures such as the Twelve (cf. Num. 1:4, 44; Ezra 8:24–30) and the SEVENTY (cf. Ex. 24:1–11), he gave new titles and ordained new offices, especially the apostles, who served as special witnesses of his ministry and resurrection. Upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ's Church was administered by EVANGELISTS, SEVENTIES, ELDERS, BISHOPS, priests, TEACHERS, and DEACONS (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Cor. 12:12–28; *see also* ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES).

As part of the RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS (Acts 3:21; cf. Moses 6:7), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints received elements from all the biblical priesthood periods, with the greater part coming from the pattern and offices of Christ's New Testament Church. Under the direction of modern prophets, priesthood holders of both the Melchizedek and Aaronic orders officiate today in a variety of offices and callings, continuing God's pattern of administering to his children's needs.

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PRIESTHOOD BLESSINGS

Priesthood blessings are pronounced in connection with most of the essential ORDINANCES of the gospel: blessing and naming children; CONFIRMATION; ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD; SETTING APART; and other occasions. In addition, any person may request a blessing at the hands of a worthy Melchizedek Priesthood bearer at any time. The person who does so is usually seeking inspired counsel and asking for official prayer and blessing under the hands of one who is authorized and discerning.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the PRIESTHOOD is not a centralized elite. Ideally, the priesthood is held by every husband and father. The home is viewed as his constant and most important ministry, regardless of the offices he may hold in the Church. One who seeks a priesthood blessing is encouraged to approach father or brother, BISHOP or HOME TEACHERS rather than prominent Church authorities. In principle and in practice, this recognizes the diversity of spiritual gifts, the individual heritage of faith, and the shared sanctity of priesthood service.

Priesthood blessings are usually conferred by LAYING ON OF HANDS, which is seen as the New Testament pattern. Exceptions are found in administering the SACRAMENT and in apostolic blessings given to a congregation (*see HC* 2:120; 5:473).

All priesthood blessings are given in the name of Jesus Christ and by authority of the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD (so named to avoid the too frequent repetition of its sacred title [D&C 107:4]). The blessing process may vary according to circumstance and individual need: e.g., the extent of preparation, the use of consecrated OIL, involvement of other persons as participants or witnesses, recording or writing the blessing (often the counsel is to "write it in your heart"), and whether and when further blessings may be appropriate. Blessings given by a father to his wife are known as husband's blessings, to his children as father's blessings; those given by a PATRIARCH, as PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS; when related to a personal crisis or need, as comfort blessings; those given in response to illness or injury, as administration to the sick.

Priesthood blessings are to be "spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit" (D&C 63:64). To refuse to give a blessing when one is called or to

attempt to give a blessing when one is unworthy is to “trifle with [sacred] things” (D&C 8:10).

In giving blessings, priesthood bearers are constantly admonished to seek the Spirit. The Prophet Joseph SMITH taught, “The Holy Ghost is God’s messenger to administer in all those priesthoods” (TPJS, p. 323). The officiator strives for the promptings and impressions of the HOLY GHOST, and these may not be what he anticipated or planned. By fasting and prayer, by experience in the things of God, and by patience, he learns to distinguish authentic inspiration from subjective factors that distort or mislead. He strives during the blessing to use appropriate language to express the ideas that impress his mind by the Spirit. The process is often strenuous: Jesus felt virtue go out of him at the touch of the woman of faith (Mark 5:25–34). Similarly, one who seeks to serve in blessing others “is liable to become weakened” (TPJS, p. 281).

Recipients are charged to unite their faith in God and Christ with the faith of others present, and to bring contrite and teachable hearts. Concentration and communion are required for both receiving and understanding blessings. As blessings are pronounced, the recipients are to take to heart the counsel offered, and adjust their lives accordingly. In cases where the recipients are unconscious, infirm, or out of touch, the main burden of faith is upon the person pronouncing the blessing, and other concerned persons present.

The efficacy of priesthood blessings is not presumed to be automatic or formulaic, or simply a matter of saying the right words. Priesthood authority does not entitle one to act independently of God, but rather bestows the right to seek the mind and will of God and then to transmit it through the priesthood blessing. Neither can a blessing be given with intent to infringe on the recipient’s own agency but “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). These are called “the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36). Unless they are complied with, the blessing “is of no use, but withdraws” (TPJS, p. 148).

Latter-day Saints cherish priesthood blessings as a vital source of grace in facing the crossroads, crises, setbacks, anxieties, and decisions of life. Those who give and receive blessings at the hands of the priesthood in this spirit are lifted up and sustained, and healed in mind, body, and spirit.

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PRIESTHOOD COUNCILS

The concept of a council in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints embodies both a philosophy of administrative behavior and an organizational body or unit. There are formally constituted councils, such as the Council of Twelve Apostles (see QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES), stake HIGH COUNCILS, and councils consisting of PRIESTHOOD QUORUM and AUXILIARY OFFICERS who work together as WARD COUNCILS or stake councils. To these latter councils concerned representatives (athletic, single adult, etc.) are sometimes added. Church councils coordinate and schedule activities, gather information, plan future programs or events, and make decisions and resolve problems for their units.

At the most basic level of organization—the FAMILY—a family council ideally exemplifies both the spirit and function of the whole concept of Church councils. In a family council, family members meet regularly to discuss plans, decisions, and problems that affect them individually and as a whole. Family councils reinforce shared commitment to the well-being of each individual and effective management of group activities.

The philosophy of a council is what sociologist Thomas O’Dea called a “democracy of participation” in Mormon culture (*The Mormons* [Chicago, 1964], p. 165). At periodic council meetings both individual and organizational needs are considered. Recognizing the unique circumstances surrounding a particular unit, geographical area, or set of individuals, the council identifies the programs and activities that need to be planned and correlated. (The council does not have final decision-making power; this resides with the unit leader, such as the STAKE PRESIDENT or BISHOP.)

Councils are more than operational coordinating mechanisms. They also serve as vehicles for family, WARD, STAKE, REGION, AREA, or general Church teaching and development. As members participate in councils, they learn about larger organizational issues. They see leadership in action, learning how to plan, analyze problems, make de-