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 officiant 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, inimical, 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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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-
This committee includes leaders of MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD quorums, who administer welfare (physical and material well-being), temple, missionary, and family history (genealogy) activities, and leaders responsible for youth priesthood programs. A ward executive secretary prepares each meeting's agenda, and the ward clerk records its minutes. The PEC also coordinates ward efforts to activate its members not regularly participating in the Church.

The PEC thus provides a forum for ward priesthood officers to foster the well-being of ward members; discuss applications of Church policy; participate in and sponsor leadership training; and report their stewardship concerns to the bishop, including problems discovered through monthly home teaching visits to congregation members.

The STAKE PRESIDENCY and HIGH COUNCIL compose the Stake Priesthood Executive Committee. They oversee the administration of all Church programs in the stake; consider issues that affect all wards in the stake; and approve nominations of members to be called for service in ward BISHOPRICS, stake priesthood quorums, and stake AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS. The stake PEC usually meets twice a month. The stake president presides and conducts. The stake executive secretary and stake clerk assist the stake presidency with the agenda and minutes of the meeting. Both the ward and stake priesthood executive committees are augmented periodically by leaders of the PRIMARY, YOUNG WOMEN, and RELIEF SOCIETY organizations to form two additional councils.

[See also Home Teaching; Ward Council.]

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PRIESTHOOD INTERVIEW

The Church has developed a system of regularly scheduled priesthood interviews for effective overseeing of delegated responsibilities. Commonly used in HOME TEACHING accountability (referred to as Home Teaching Interviews) and in other Church programs, these private meetings between a priesthood leader and a member who reports to him are designed to increase communication, resolve concerns, maintain accountability, build spirituality, and empower members to fulfill their responsibilities.