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The calling of a stake president is a sacred and spiritual experience. Under the direction of the First Presidency, General Authorities and Area Seventies are charged with this responsibility. During the 16 years I have served as a General Authority, I have extended calls in many cultures and continents—from North America to South America, from Europe to Asia.

In each experience, I have treasured two teachings I received in my first few weeks as a General Authority. From President Thomas S. Monson: “When you are on the Lord’s errand, you are entitled to the Lord’s help.” From President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “You will have experiences in your ministry when you put a question to the Lord through the veil

The Spiritual Gifts



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and receive an immediate response.” In every case these two promises have been realized.

The experience of calling a stake president is always the same, and it is always different. It is the *same* in that the two General Authorities or Area Seventies who are sent feel an overwhelming dependence upon the Lord, and each must receive the same inspiration before callings are extended. The Spirit of the Lord always powerfully accompanies and confirms the selection process. It is *different* in that the man called varies greatly from stake to stake. Sometimes new stake presidents are men of great experience and years of service; sometimes they are younger and full of faith; their occupations follow no pattern.

positions. As we met with a Gospel Doctrine teacher at 10:00 p.m., the Lord powerfully confirmed this was His selection. Only after extending the call did we learn that he had been at his home, awaiting our phone call. Several months earlier, before any announcement of a change in the stake presidency,

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Given the Stake President

The Bestowal of the Keys

While a stake president is normally found among the current leadership of the stake, there are exceptions. On one occasion we interviewed brethren into the late evening, unable to feel the confirming Spirit among the outstanding men we were meeting. Finally, after exhausting the prepared list of those to interview, we turned to respected men not currently serving in leadership

he and his wife were awakened in the night knowing that the calling would come to him.

Those who serve as stake presidents do not seek the office they hold. All are humbled and some are overwhelmed when they are called. As I called a stake president in Europe who had been a member of the Church only about 10 years, he gasped, “Oh no, no, not me. I cannot do it.” Fortunately, his wonderful wife, who was at his side, put her arms

around him and said, “Honey, you can do it. I know you can.” She was right, and he served very well.

In the Philippines, a man who had seen the Church grow quickly with very young leadership, responded when called, “Oh no, not me. I am too old.” When it was pointed out that some members of the Twelve were three decades older than he, he accepted and served very well.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you” (John 15:16), said the Savior. We neither seek nor refuse the calls that come to us.

Sometime, either before, during, or after the call, the Lord confirms to the man being called that his call is of God. One young stake president reported his confirmation this way:

“When I was interviewed, I was 32 years old and had served about four years as bishop. One of those conducting the interviews asked two poignant questions: (1) How did you gain your testimony? and (2) Would you share with us your testimony of the Savior? I shared my experience as a teenager, shortly after my mother passed away, when I learned for myself the truthfulness of the restored gospel, specifically with regard to the Book of Mormon.

“As I shared my testimony of the Savior, I received a witness that I would be called as the next stake president. I drove home and told my wife about my experience. When I told her that I thought I could be called as the next stake president, she responded, ‘You’re good, but you’re not that good.’ The phone rang two hours later, and I was invited to return with my wife, and the call was extended.”

Following the sustaining vote in a general session of stake conference, we who are sent place our hands on the head of the new stake president and bestow upon him the keys of the priesthood necessary to preside over and direct the affairs of the stake. These keys to preside over the stake come by delegation from the President of the Church and the other 14 Apostles who hold all the keys upon the earth. Within these keys are spiritual authority and power.

The Lord has always given keys to His chosen Apostles. Unto Peter He declared, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou

shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). Some of these keys are then shared with local leaders. In Zarahemla, Alma “ordained priests and elders, by laying on his hands according to the order of God, to preside and watch over the church” (Alma 6:1).

Outward Manifestation of the Keys

Interestingly, there was a time when obtaining a temple recommend required the signature of the President of the Church. Now this authority is held in the keys delegated to the stake president. With his counselors, he also recommends bishops to the First Presidency and ordains them once they are approved; he approves those to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood; he recommends and sets apart full-time missionaries; and he serves as a judge in Israel in helping those with serious sins to gain full forgiveness. He guides the workings and decisions of the stake’s bishops and branch presidents.

In these capacities, the Lord pours out revelation upon His stake presidents. A stake president living in the southern United States shared the following experience with me:

“In October 2007, a sister came to visit with me to obtain her temple recommend. During the interview, I asked her if her husband was going to visit with me for his recommend after she finished her interview. She told me that her husband had not been to the temple in over 20 years and that they had never been sealed in the temple in their 40 years of marriage. I felt a strong prompting to visit with this brother immediately. So strong was the prompting that I left my office, found him on the other side of the building, and brought him back to my office for an interview. After an interview, during which time we were joined by his bishop, he was given a temple recommend. This was a very emotional experience for all of us, especially his wife. I received an invitation later that week to attend their sealing in the temple.

“In early 2008, about four months after this couple was sealed, this brother got up in the morning to go to work and collapsed and died in their home. I am forever grateful that I listened to the promptings of the Spirit and encouraged this brother to do what he so needed to do in his life.”



The stake president approves those to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, interviews members for temple recommends, and serves as a judge in Israel.

Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Promises

The Lord has declared that a stake is to be “for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm” (D&C 115:6). A stake president is the Lord’s shepherd who must help ensure that the spirit of safety and spiritual security are felt within the fellowship of the Church. He must carefully assure that the doctrine taught is true and pure. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) once said:

“The duties of a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood might be applied to the president of the stake. He ‘is to watch over the [entire stake], and be with and strengthen [the members],



“And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking;

“And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty’ (D&C 20:53–55).”¹

His work includes inspiration in how to strengthen families, fortify the rising generation, invite more of Heavenly Father’s children into the cleansing waters of

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baptism, reach out to those who have drifted from the Church, and bring the ordinances of the temple to living members and to those who have come before us.

In all of these important responsibilities, the Lord blesses the stake president with an enhancement of spiritual gifts. In the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord speaks of the many spiritual gifts and declares:

“For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God.

“To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:11–12).

The Lord then adds, “Unto such as God shall appoint and ordain to watch over the church . . . are to have it given unto them to discern all those gifts . . . that there may be

a head, in order that every member may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:27, 29).

At times these gifts are associated with spiritual promises the Lord will fulfill. A former stake president from Brazil shared with me this experience:

“A faithful single mother with four teenage children was struggling economically. I asked her, ‘Sister, are your children attending seminary regularly?’ She replied, ‘I have many challenges and live far away from the chapel. It is dangerous.’ At that moment, I felt a strong prompting to counsel and promise her. I said, ‘If you don’t have the money, you need to walk the kilometers with them. Go with them; sit in class with them. If you will do that, you will save your children, and all will marry in the temple.’ I was startled by what I had said but could not deny the powerful inspiration.

“She accepted the counsel and for many years walked with her children to seminary. Her promise has now been fulfilled. All are

married in the temple, and her son is serving as bishop in his ward.”

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts given a stake president is a deeper and expanding love for the people he has been called to serve. When I was called as a stake president, I found myself awed by the powerful sense of concern and love I felt for those of the stake. Even for those involved in serious sin, I felt a great sense of empathy and desire to help. These feelings of love are always combined with the desire to help members become truly converted to the Savior and His restored gospel. I had served many years as a counselor, but when I had the keys of presidency, the feelings were more potent and motivating. I felt that perhaps I was receiving in part the gift of charity spoken of by Mormon when he admonished, “Pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48).

These feelings bring a stake president to reach out, and miracles follow. A stake president from South America recounted an example of how this love moved him to seek after one who was lost:

“I had a strong impression that I needed to try to find a brother who had served many years before as my missionary companion. He was married and less active in the Church. His membership record was in a small unit 150 kilometers [93 miles] from the stake center. I traveled there and spoke with the branch president, who told me that my former missionary companion was living far out in the country. The president gave me directions to the small village. After a while the asphalt road turned into a dirt road. After many more kilometers, I realized I was lost. I stopped the car and was about to give up. It was a very hot day, and the car had no air conditioner. The dust from the road was difficult for my wife and children. I knelt on the road and asked for help from the Lord.

“Some hours later, we arrived in the small village and found my missionary companion. I invited him to come back. He became active in the Church and served in many leadership positions. His son served an honorable mission,

and today my friend and former companion is a counselor in the bishopric.”

There is power in the office. The Lord stands with His stake presidents. This is from a stake president in Ecuador: “I observed a man in the stake who often appeared unhappy. One day I received a strong impression that I needed to visit this man. I drove immediately to his home. He told me that he was very sad because for many years he hadn’t exchanged a single word with his father. He explained that his father was a hard man and had cut off their relationship. I asked him if he would like to fix the situation. After driving to his father’s house, I stopped the car in front. I knocked on the door and heard a voice ask, ‘Who is it?’ I recognized the voice of his father and answered, ‘Your stake president, Brother.’ He opened the door and saw me standing side by side with his son. Without a single word, they embraced each other and began to cry. The situation was fixed.”

In the world there are more than 2,800 stake presidents. In many ways, they are ordinary people—like you and me. They are working on their salvation just as we are working on ours. Yet they have received an extraordinary calling. Hands have been placed on their heads, and they have received priesthood keys.

I have met hundreds of stake presidents. They are men of accomplishment and integrity in their personal and professional lives. They are full of faith, with an uncompromising desire to please the Lord.

I have stayed in their homes, knelt with them in prayer, and heard their sincere supplications to Heavenly Father. I have felt the power of the Lord upon them. The Lord loves them and bestows upon them spiritual gifts.

Let each of us pray for our stake president. Let us stand by his side and help him. Let us listen to him and trust him. “And Israel shall be saved . . . ; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and no more be confounded at all” (D&C 35:25). ■

NOTE

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Stake President,” *Liahona*, July 2000, 61; *Ensign*, May 2000, 51.