

OUR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY COUNCIL



By Jennifer Lyn Pond

As I consider family councils in the Church and their relation to parenthood, I think of the symbolism of the oxen huddled in a protective circle under the baptismal fonts in temples. In the wild, when musk oxen sense a threat, they will gather into a tight, outward-facing circle, forming a cluster of heads and horns. Calves hide safely inside the circle. When the herd stays together in this tight formation, their defense of their little ones is virtually impenetrable. As parents, we can also create a protection around our children by using the tool of the family council. Over the years, our family has taken advantage of family councils to foster communication and to protect and strengthen our family.

On one occasion, we held a family council to decide

what to do with our pets. Emma, our nine-year-old, had two parakeets. Michael, our 10-year-old, had a gorgeous reddish-orange bearded dragon. We loved these pets; we would hold them on our shoulders and take them on walks. But unfortunately, our kids were becoming busier as they got older, and I had noticed the pets sitting in their cages more often.

First I discussed my concerns with my husband, who had noticed the same thing. We looked at the previous year's finances and were shocked to discover how much the pets were costing us. We wondered if the pets really gave us the same amount of enjoyment they used to and if they would be happier with other owners.

We decided to hold a family council to get our children's



We can encircle our families with the promised protection of family councils.

input. We explained our concerns and told our children we would have a family council the coming Sunday. We asked them to pray and prepare their thoughts for our council. This time to think and pray was important because they were initially upset at the prospect of losing their pets. We assured them that we had not already decided to get rid of the pets and that we would counsel and make a decision together.

When Sunday came, we began our council with prayer, asking Heavenly Father to help us be open to His will. My husband explained that the purpose of our council was not to vote and go with the majority's wishes but to seek God's will and wait until all family members felt good about the decision.

We first asked Michael and Emma to present their feelings. They were prepared with a pros-and-cons list. My husband and I listened, added points, and asked follow-up questions. As we discussed the needs of our family and our pets, we reached a unique solution that hadn't occurred to us earlier.

We decided Michael would let his bearded dragon go to a new owner and that Emma would keep her birds for now. Initially this idea sounded unfair to me—to let only one child keep her pets. But it actually was our children who realized that Emma still needed and loved her pets and that Michael admittedly viewed caring for his pet as an obligation. The birds had each other for company and weren't as lonely as the dragon might have been, and the dragon was certainly more expensive. The solution made sense, but my husband and I never would have come to this conclusion without counseling with our children.

Our family council not only helped us make a decision but also helped us strengthen our family. Whereas the children might have resented a decision made solely by us as parents, involving them in the decision-making process helped maintain harmony in our home. It showed our children we value their input and seek to follow the Lord's counsel to "let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified" (D&C 88:122).

I know as we provide a place to discuss worries, questions, and goals in the inspired setting of the family council, our families will be blessed. Just like with the musk oxen, if our families are united after seeking the Lord's will, it will be difficult for spiritual threats of contention to get through our protective circle of love. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.



WHY COUNCILS?

"The family is under heavy attack from antagonists bent on extinguishing this powerful source of light in a darkening world. Successful families have a wide assortment of tools, and one of the most useful tools is the family council."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, in "Family Councils: A Conversation with Elder and Sister Ballard," *Ensign*, June 2003, 14.