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# INSTRUCTING YOUNG MEN

## “MORE PERFECTLY”

*God honors priesthood leaders who sacrifice, and He will bless them with increased capacity to bring young men unto Christ.*

**W**hen I was 12 or 13, I remember lying out one night during a campout looking up at the stars. We had a wonderful priesthood adviser who asked us, “Who do you think put those stars there? Who do you think is the architect of all you see?”

Our adviser told us that there is a Creator who knows each of His creations, including us. He encouraged us to come unto Him and to find out how much He loves us. He inspired me to find out what my Father in Heaven wanted me to do.

Many stake leaders who attend the annual Priesthood Leadership Conference on Scouting at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, USA, have a similar experience. They leave the conference inspired and desirous to find out what their Father in Heaven would have them do—especially when it comes to blessing the lives of young men and helping them survive and thrive in a world that is deviating from God’s patterns.

*Left, inset: Scouts, leaders, and parents salute during a morning flag ceremony at the Priesthood Leadership Conference on Scouting.*

*Background: The Tooth of Time, a signature landmark at Philmont Scout Ranch.*

## HIGH IDEALS

“Put a boy in touch with nature, and the job of inspiring him with high ideals is an easier one than in any other environment.”

Waite Phillips, benefactor of the Philmont Scout Ranch, in Stephen Zimmer and Larry Walker, *Philmont: A Brief History of the New Mexico Scout Ranch* (2000), 68.



Left: Conference participants Kevin Kovach, Norm Bird, and Brandon Bodily put their knot-tying skills to the test. The conference “really does have power to change the lives of leaders and young men in our stakes,” says M. Tim Welch, pictured right.

of salvation and how to utilize Scouting to strengthen capacity, character, and confidence, helping young men to become better servants in their families, their quorums, and the Church.

## An Outpouring of the Spirit

The Church has a long and wonderful tradition of priesthood leaders gathering from around the country every summer to receive training at Philmont. Next year, 2013, marks not only the 100th anniversary of Scouting within the Church but also the 50th anniversary of the Priesthood Leadership Conference.

This conference gives stake presidents an opportunity to be edified by the Young Men and Primary general presidencies and to learn from each other. Depending on available space, a stake president may bring one of his counselors, a member of the stake Young Men presidency, or a high counselor. The conference focuses on the Aaronic Priesthood and on how wards and stakes can implement Scouting to help young men develop as priesthood holders. It also helps participants develop a better understanding of why the Church has an activity program for the young men.

The conference is an experience of deep spiritual learning and motivation. Many who attend feel an outpouring of the Spirit and receive inspiration regarding how to utilize the Aaronic Priesthood in the work

The conference focuses on priesthood and on how Scouting can function within the priesthood to help young men learn their duties and “go and do” them (1 Nephi 3:7).

## Scouting and the Aaronic Priesthood

Young men need Church and Scouting activities for a lot of reasons. One reason is to help them develop leadership skills, brotherhood within their quorums, and relationships with adult shepherds who love them and are constantly inspiring, motivating, and watching over them. Another reason is that Scouting gives them opportunities to invite others into their brotherhood and also to invite others to come unto Christ, which is one of their duties as Aaronic Priesthood holders.<sup>1</sup> Typically a young man will invite a friend to a Scouting activity before he will invite him to a priesthood meeting.

At the Priesthood Leadership Conference we focus on how to utilize Scouting within the Aaronic Priesthood. We hope participants leave with a better understanding of the Aaronic Priesthood’s role in a young man’s life and with an urgency to ensure that appropriate Scouting activities are held that can round out a young man in physical,



## CHANGING LEADERS, CHANGING LIVES

By M. Tim Welch

The Priesthood Leadership Conference at Philmont was not something I had ever planned on attending. I am embarrassed to admit it, but an outdoor camping experience at my age scores modestly below a tooth extraction on the *enjoyability* index. In contrast, during dinner the first evening, I heard a number of wide-eyed fellow participants speak in reverent tones about fulfilling a life's dream of finally arriving at the premier BSA venue in North America.

"They have the same excitement about Philmont as I did about walking down Magnolia Lane at the Augusta National Golf Club during the Masters last year," I told my wife, Michele. She smiled, but I knew she had serious doubts about whether I was fully committed to making the conference a positive leadership experience.

I am not entirely sure at what moment during the conference it happened, but it *did* happen. The spirit of Philmont became overwhelming, and the experience of spending time, shoulder to shoulder, with wonderful men and women consecrated to helping bring young men to Christ was transforming.

I felt the spirit of Philmont during the morning flag ceremony while wearing the Scout uniform and as feelings of gratitude washed over me for the privilege of living in a free country. I felt it during every training session as I listened to inspired leaders teach with great insight and clarity about how Scouting can assist parents and priesthood leaders to help young men fulfill their duty to God. I felt it during meals in quiet, intimate conversations with new friends. And I felt it kneeling in prayer on a wooden floor in a tent while the wind whirled around our encampment.

In the process I learned that this extraordinary conference really does have power to change the lives of leaders and young men in our stakes. I also learned that if you are willing to give your heart to the experience, even reluctantly at first, there is something at Philmont that will change you.

Part of it is in the sheer enormousness of its 137,500 acres. Part of it is in sharing the experience with your spouse. Part of it is in the laughter and the tears. And part of it is in recognizing that God's hand is in this work and that He can perform miracles in our lives—especially in a mountain setting where the splendor of His creations evidences His work in rich abundance.

While I may always feel more comfortable at Augusta National than in a walled tent on a desert plateau, I will never be the same. I will forever cherish this shared experience with remarkable people, inspired leaders, gifted teachers, and a humble tent that surprisingly started to feel like home.





Youth return to camp following a weeklong backpacking trek.

[them] to understand” (D&C 88:78).

We also feel very good about Duty to God, which helps young men learn their priesthood duties, strengthen their testimony and relationship with their Heavenly Father, and prepare them for life’s journey as a disciple of Christ.

spiritual, social, and educational areas—areas that will prepare him for the Melchizedek Priesthood, the temple, a mission, marriage, work, and life.

The Priesthood Leadership Conference helps stake presidents catch the vision of how to best utilize Scouting in their stakes according to the inspiration they receive at the conference and afterward as a result of attending. They come to realize that once the light turns on for Young Men leaders regarding the importance of becoming trained and using available resources, those leaders will say, “Wow, this is really easy. All the work’s already been done for me.”

Many Young Men leaders in the Church understand the Scouting program; fewer understand the Varsity and Venture programs. We encourage Varsity and Venture leaders to implement these excellent programs. They have been well developed and are some of the best tools anywhere for teaching leadership and self-reliance. Because we use the sacred funds of the Church to register our young men as Scouts, we need to make sure the Lord is pleased with how we use what we purchase.

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord admonishes us to “teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom,” including “things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth” (D&C 88:77, 79). What might interest a young man in the heavens and on the earth? How about archaeology, astronomy, chemistry, environmental science, geology, nature, oceanography, space exploration, and weather? These things are all taught through merit badges, which help young men to “be instructed more perfectly . . . in all things . . . that are expedient for

### The Best Vacation We’ve Ever Had

The Priesthood Leadership Conference can accept about 165 participants, plus their families, which means as many as 700 people may attend each week of the two-week conference.

Families are blessed when they’re at Philmont. The experience affords them the unique opportunity of enjoying the company of others who have gathered from around the country while also giving them time to bond and share experiences. Children and spouses have wonderful, fun activities to engage in. A highlight is the way families come together.

Older youth, including young women, can go on week-long backpacking trips. It’s inspiring to see young men and young women do hard things like a 50-mile (80 km) hike up a mountain and then return to their families with increased confidence that they can face challenges. That’s the essence of Scouting—to build self-confidence and the capacity to meet challenges. The reunion of family members and trekkers at the end of the week is priceless.

Some who have attended have told us, “This is the best use of our vacation time we’ve ever had as a family.”

We recognize that it’s a tremendous sacrifice for stake leaders to take a week off and, for many of them, travel a long distance to join us. But I bear witness that God honors priesthood leaders who sacrifice, and He will bless them with increased capacity to bring young men unto Christ and to prepare them for the future. ■

#### NOTE

1. See *Fulfilling My Duty to God: For Aaronic Priesthood Holders* (booklet, 2010), 28–29, 52–53, 76–77.