

What **Every Bishop** Wants His Ward Members to Know

*Here are eight truths I learned
during my service as a bishop.*

By Michael Meyers

I had the wonderful opportunity to serve as a bishop. During those years, I learned more lessons than can be enumerated. But I did learn eight truths that I believe are universal. While this list is not all-inclusive, it is my attempt at sharing what every bishop hopes his ward members know.

1. The bishop loves every member of his ward in a very real way.

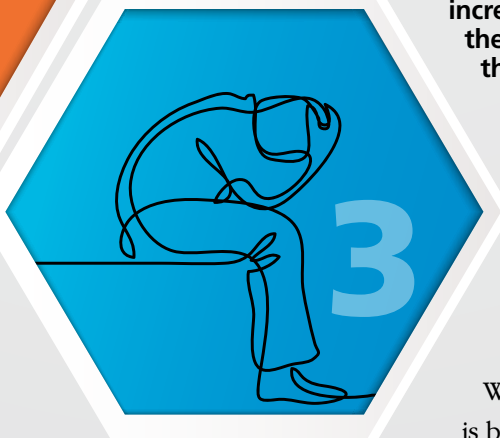
The love a bishop has for his ward is connected to the love that Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have for each of us. When a bishop looks out at the members in a sacrament meeting, compassion and empathy rest upon him in a way unlike anything he has experienced. When a bishop stands up and shares how much he loves his ward members, his feelings are heartfelt and real. Know that your bishop loves you, is concerned about you, and cares about you more than you know.



2. The bishop is physically, emotionally, and spiritually sustained by the faith and prayers of the members.

A bishop spends countless hours serving. He will often spend many hours at church on Sunday and additional weeknights after work visiting, interviewing, and caring for the members of his ward.

The bishop is able to do this week after week because of the faith and prayers of the ward members. As a newly called bishop, tears involuntarily flowed every time I heard a member pray to “bless the bishop.” Your prayers of faith truly are answered, and the bishop receives and feels the sustaining influence of those prayers. The Lord answers those faith-filled prayers upon the heads of the bishops of the Church.



3. The bishop often feels incredibly inadequate for the calling (even after three or four years).

I have known very few bishops who felt they were truly “prepared” for the calling. I do know, however, that “whom the Lord calls, the Lord qualifies.”¹

While a bishop knows he is becoming qualified, he also struggles with feeling like he is never going to do the calling well. He will do his best to give wise counsel when needed, to not offend people, and to be in tune with the Spirit, but he will still wonder at times if he is fulfilling his calling acceptably.

4. The Spirit of God can work through the bishop when he is counseling with ward members.

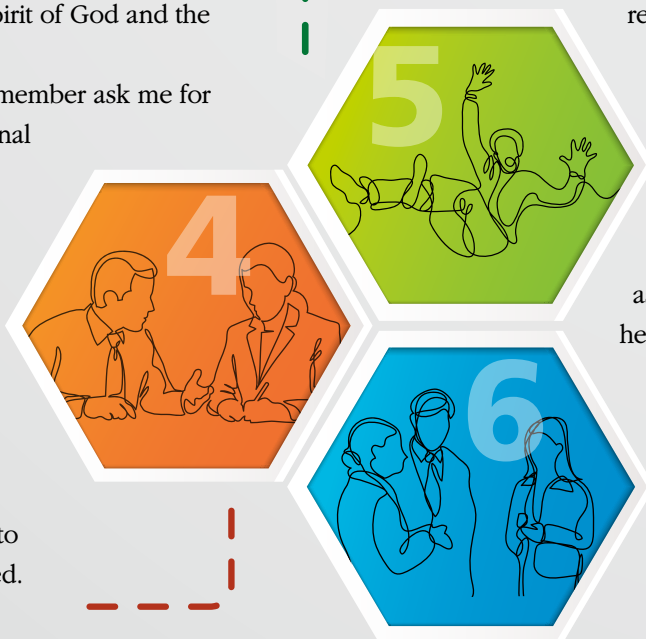
When asked what I miss most about serving as a bishop, I tell people that I miss the strong influence of the Spirit that accompanies the mantle of a bishop. Whether consoling those who had lost loved ones, speaking with those struggling with unfaithful spouses, or calling people to repentance, the Spirit that is available to a faithful bishop is the Spirit of God and the spirit of revelation.

I recently had a former ward member ask me for help in dealing with some personal issues. She had moved to a new ward and was not sure if she wanted to go to her new bishop for guidance. I shared with her what I have shared many times since being released, which was that while I was happy to assist, I no longer held the keys that a bishop holds and that those keys could be crucial to providing the support she needed. I suggested that she speak with her bishop. I visited with her two weeks later, and she said that she had met with her bishop and it was as if he already knew what her issues were and how to best help her. While the bishop is certainly fallible, the Lord inspires him, guides him, and blesses lives through his words.

5. The bishop is human; sometimes he makes mistakes and sometimes he does things wrong.

Bishops, after all, are mortal men. They have imperfections, weaknesses, biases, and their own personal issues. The Spirit qualifies the man who holds the office of bishop, but the bishop is still a man subject to the same issues and weaknesses that we all face.

This realization should not reduce the honor we show to his calling or the heed we give to his counsel. A bishop is well aware of his weaknesses and strives to overcome them or at least keep them out of his service as a bishop. As hard as he tries, he will always be imperfect.



6. The bishop feels that he can never see ward members enough or do enough good.

Every day a bishop wonders whom else he could or should have helped that day. I would have loved to visit with every member regularly, but I had a full-time job, my family, the youth program, and certain ward members with great needs. There was just not enough time to see every member on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, as a bishop, the Spirit sometimes prompted me to visit a certain member who was struggling. Many times, those visits started with them saying, “I knew you would come.” The Spirit we felt was often overwhelming as we both realized that the visit was proof that God answers prayers.

I also always enjoyed the reception I received at the doors of those active, “non-struggling” members. These good people go to church each week, serve faithfully in callings, have no tremendous outward challenges, and generally do not regularly receive visits from priesthood leaders. They were grateful to have some one-on-one time with their bishop. To all of you may I say, “Thank you! Carry on! Know that your bishop loves you and would visit more if he could.”

7. Your bishop really, truly, honestly needs you to minister to each other.

As a bishop, whenever I was told a ward member was struggling, I would always ask, “Who are the home and visiting teachers?” This was one way of assessing that the member’s needs would be met both short and long term. The bishop, acting without help from other members of the ward and stake, has limited resources. He certainly can—and will—go visit people in a crisis. But with the priesthood and Relief Society resources available to him, his reach can be extended.

This is what ministering is about. There are times when some of us forget why we minister to each other: The Lord has commanded us to “love one another” (John 13:34). Know that your bishop uses ministering as an inspired way to be “more present” in the lives of the ward members.



8. The bishop wishes he could do everything for his flock.

Anytime, day or night, whether it is a priesthood blessing, counseling a wayward child, or rushing to an accident scene, he would like to do whatever a member needs. He can’t always do it all, and he might not be the right person in every situation, but don’t be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Know that the bishop is there to serve in those times and that you are both richly blessed for working together.

I am humbled by the sacred opportunity I had to serve in this holy calling. In my service, I went from a belief to knowledge. I no longer believe that the gospel is true; I know it is true. I no longer believe that God knows me; I know that God is infinitely aware of each one of us, of our daily lives and our personal struggles. Furthermore, I know that He works through His servants, especially those who hold priesthood keys. I know that I could not have served as a bishop without God’s mindfulness of this work. It is the truthfulness of the gospel and God’s love for His children that enables every bishop to serve. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTE

1. Thomas S. Monson, “Duty Calls,” *Ensign*, May 1996, 44.

