





By Elder
Per G. Malm
Of the Seventy

Church Handbooks

THE WRITTEN ORDER OF THINGS

As we follow the handbooks and use the collective wisdom they offer, the Lord will help us and those we serve to become “complete in him.”

As a returned missionary, busy with a young family and my own company, I was called to be the president of a good-sized branch with many faithful and mature members. Did I feel prepared, trained, and educated to start serving? No! I had good counselors with whom I could discuss issues. But was their help enough? No!

The Lord expects “every man [to] learn his duty” (D&C 107:99), and He expects us to “treasure up in [our] minds . . . the words of [God]” (D&C 84:85). Then He expects us to trust the inspiration of the Holy Ghost—that special gift given to all members with the promise of continued guidance and revelation.

Thinking back on that calling and on other callings, I realize that in addition to the Holy Ghost and the scriptures, what really helped me were the Church handbooks! They were a treasure of information—as a guide to my initial learning and as a valuable reference along the way.

Why Do We Need the Church Handbooks?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught,

“While [the] handbooks do not have the same standing as the scriptures, they do represent the most current interpretations and procedural directions of the Church’s highest authorities.”¹ President Russell M. Nelson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, added that those authorities—the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—are men of “seasoned maturity, experience, and extensive preparation.”²

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SAFETY IN HANDBOOKS

“Whether you’ve been a lifelong member of the Church or are a relatively new member, consult the handbook when you are uncertain about a policy or procedure. You may think you know how to handle the situation when, in fact, you may be on the wrong track. There is safety in the handbooks.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Opening Remarks,” 2010 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting.

Thus, the Church handbooks reflect the collective wisdom—derived from tested, proven experiences—of prophets and apostles. That wisdom teaches us the best way to achieve good results in carrying out the mission of the Church over time. The Lord has counseled, “Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom” (D&C 88:118; 109:7). Certainly, the wisdom in the handbooks qualifies them as “best books.”

The Handbooks Help Us Maintain Policies, Procedures, and Programs

President Thomas S. Monson has declared that without the handbooks, “it would be nearly impossible to maintain the integrity of the policies, procedures, and programs of the Church.” He added, “Over the years, we’ve had to correct many attempts by well-meaning leaders to change some of the programs of the Church.”

President Monson said that when leaders do not correctly follow procedures, “the First

Presidency must ratify the action or have it redone.” In other words, if we ignore the handbooks, we may end up adding to the workload of the First Presidency.

“In almost all cases,” he said, “if the leaders would only read, understand, and follow the handbook, such problems would not occur. . . . There is safety in the handbooks.”³

President Monson added that whatever our leadership calling is, the handbooks contain a treasure of information and guidance that help us minister effectively, understand the proper functioning of the Church, learn and fulfill our duties (see D&C 107:99), and prepare for future leadership positions.

The Handbooks Teach What Is Essential

The handbooks teach that while “parents have the vital responsibility to help their children prepare to return to Heavenly Father,” the Savior’s “Church provides the organization and means for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God’s children.” The handbooks also teach that the Church “provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them.”⁴

The doctrinal framework for administering the Church is found in the first three chapters of *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*:

1. Families and the Church in God’s Plan
2. Priesthood Principles
3. Leadership in the Church of Jesus Christ

We should study these three chapters carefully. They remind us that the Church “was organized by God to assist in His work to bring to pass the salvation and exaltation of His children.”⁵ It does this through activities,

opportunities, and programs for service, blessing, and personal growth that focus on divinely appointed responsibilities which support and strengthen individuals and families.

These responsibilities “include helping members live the gospel of Jesus Christ, gathering Israel through missionary work, caring for the poor and needy, and enabling salvation for the dead by building temples and performing vicarious ordinances.”⁶

As we understand this doctrinal framework, the purpose and role of all callings in the Church becomes clear: “Priesthood and auxiliary leaders and teachers strive to help others become true followers of Jesus Christ.” Further, “Church organizations and programs exist to bless individuals and families and are not ends in themselves.”⁷

The handbooks are doctrinally based in the scriptures, including the Savior’s admonition to Peter: “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

The Handbooks Facilitate Revelation

While helping a less-active member return to the Church, the member’s bishop reviewed the chapter on Church discipline in *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops*. Then, after speaking with his stake presidency, the bishop decided to hold a disciplinary council.

“We met beforehand as a bishopric and reviewed the handbook to remind ourselves of proper procedures and to identify points relevant to the case at hand,” the bishop said. “We felt strongly the Spirit of the Lord assisting us as we conversed with the member.”

Later, after the bishopric had prayed for the Lord’s help, one of the counselors felt

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impressed that they should again read aloud the relevant portions of *Handbook 1*. When they had finished, the bishop asked each counselor what he recommended.

“Bishop, you might be surprised, but this is what I feel,” said the first counselor in making his recommendation. The second counselor felt the same, as did the bishop.

“Reading the handbook to each other allowed the Spirit to enlighten our minds,” the bishop recalled. “The principles became clearer as to how they related to this situation, and each of us was guided to the same answer. We were well prepared to provide appropriate counsel to help our dear brother come back to Christ.”

As this bishopric discovered, the instructions found in the Church handbooks “can facilitate revelation *if they are used to provide an understanding of principles, policies, and procedures to apply while seeking the guidance of the Spirit.*”⁸



The collective wisdom found in the handbooks is organized in such a way that it can be easily accessed and used to create a true service culture that should exist in all wards and stakes of the Savior's Church.

The Handbooks Help Us Bless Those We Serve

As we read, understand, and follow the handbooks, they become a blessing to those we serve.⁹ A policy change outlined in *Handbook 2*, for example, helped a bishop bless and strengthen one father who thought he would be unable to ordain his 12-year-old son to the Aaronic Priesthood.

Chapter 20 states, “Bishops and stake presidents have discretion to allow priesthood holders who are not fully temple worthy to perform or participate in some ordinances and blessings,” including baptisms and Aaronic Priesthood ordinations.¹⁰

Without a temple recommend, this father thought he would be unable to ordain his son. But his bishop, “as guided by the Spirit,”¹¹ granted permission following an interview.

“That experience became a turning point in his life,” his current bishop noted. “It was part of the process of his becoming temple worthy, of being sealed with his wife in the temple, and of having their children sealed to them.”

Flexibility and Adaptation—within Proper Boundaries

Maintaining uniformity in Church principles, policies, and procedures “will bring the influence of the Holy Ghost into the

lives of leaders and members,” said Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹² But in a worldwide Church where members face a variety of political, social, and economic conditions, some branches and wards may lack sufficient membership, leadership, and resources to carry out the full program of the Church. Other units may face issues related to security, transportation, communication, and family economic circumstances.

Chapter 17 in *Handbook 2* clarifies “where uniformity is required” as well as the “circumstances that may permit local adaptation” in the staffing and programs of auxiliaries and in the format and frequency of leadership meetings and activities. Adaptation should be done, of course, only after leaders seek guidance from the Holy Ghost.¹³



As they do so, “all wards and branches, regardless of their size or circumstances, can experience the same abundance of the Spirit of the Lord.”¹⁴

The Written Order of Things

The handbooks provide us with what could be called a “written order of things.”

Handbook 1, available to bishops and stake presidents, outlines “the general responsibilities of stake presidents and bishops” and provides “detailed information about policies and procedures,”¹⁵ ranging from temples, marriage, and missionary service to welfare, Church discipline, and finances.

Handbook 2, available (including on LDS.org) to all Church leaders, reduces the complexity of Church programs while allowing, as noted above, for flexibility and some local adaptation. It “is a guide for members of ward and stake councils”¹⁶ and their auxiliaries in administering the Church and its work of salvation.

The collective wisdom found in the handbooks is organized in such a way that it can be easily accessed and used to create a true service culture that should exist in all wards and stakes of the Savior’s Church. But to access that wisdom, we must study the handbooks, learn from them, internalize their principles, and put those principles into practice! The result will be light, understanding, and the long-term blessing of discovering the best way to serve our brothers and sisters.

Regarding our service in the Church, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has observed: “As we extend our hands and hearts toward others in Christlike love, something wonderful happens to us. Our own spirits become healed, more refined, and stronger. We become happier, more peaceful, and more receptive to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

The Handbooks Help Us See the Complete Picture

During general conference in April 2015, Elder Rafael E. Pino of the Seventy related the story of how one of his sons

became frustrated while putting together a jigsaw puzzle. “He finally learned to do the puzzle,” Elder Pino recalled, “when he understood that each small piece had its place in the final picture.”¹⁸

In whatever capacity we serve in the Church, the handbooks, like the image on the box of a jigsaw puzzle, give us a vision—the final picture. That picture will guide us and give us a better understanding of what the Lord wants us to accomplish in His service. As we follow the handbooks and use the collective wisdom they offer, the Lord will help us and those we serve to become “complete in him” (Colossians 2:10).

The handbooks will remain an integral part of administering the Church and blessing its members and leaders regardless of future changes in format and content. As President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has declared, the handbooks “will become a treasure to you as you use [them] to help you lead others to choose the way of eternal life. That is [their] purpose.”¹⁹ ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Overview of the New Handbooks,” *2010 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 2010, lds.org/broadcasts/archive/worldwide-leadership-training/2010/11.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Sustaining the Prophets,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 75.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “Opening Remarks,” *2010 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*.
4. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.1.5.
5. *Handbook 2*, 2.2.
6. *Handbook 2*, 2.2.
7. *Handbook 2*, 1.2.2, 1.4.
8. *Handbook 1: Stake Presidents and Bishops*, v; *Handbook 2*, v; emphasis added.
9. See Thomas S. Monson, “Opening Remarks,” *2010 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*.
10. *Handbook 2*, 20.1.2.
11. *Handbook 2*, 20.1.2.
12. Quentin L. Cook, “Selected Principles from the New Handbooks,” *2010 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*.
13. See *Handbook 2*, 17.1, 17.2.
14. *Handbook 2*, 17.
15. *Handbook 1*, v.
16. *Handbook 2*, v.
17. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “You Are My Hands,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 75.
18. See Rafael E. Pino, “The Eternal Perspective of the Gospel,” *Ensign*, May 2015, 117–18.
19. Henry B. Eyring, “First Presidency Message: Handbooks, Revelations, and Treasures,” *2011 Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting* (2011), lds.org/broadcasts/article/worldwide-leadership-training/2011/02/first-presidency-message-handbooks-revelations-and-treasures.