



TO SIT IN Council

BRINGING GREATER
POWER TO MELCHIZEDEK
PRIESTHOOD AND
RELIEF SOCIETY

Foreword by Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

During my apostolic ministry, I have consistently emphasized the power and importance of councils, including stake, ward, auxiliary, and family councils. I believe that working through councils is the most effective way to get real results.

This month, we implement some simple but important changes in the curriculum that members of Melchizedek Priesthood quorums and Relief Societies study when they meet in their respective organizations each Sunday. In addition to studying the words of living prophets from the most recent conference, we will also “sit in council” (D&C 107:89) together to discuss issues we face and needs we have.

As we learn to counsel together more effectively, God will bless us with an increased flow of revelation and understanding and greater power to accomplish His work.

By Michael Magleby

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Before this world was created, Heavenly Father accomplished His work through councils (see D&C 121:32). Beginning with Adam and Eve, God’s people have sought His counsel in councils. In fact, God referred to Himself as “Man of Counsel” (Moses 7:35). Early in this dispensation, Joseph Smith began restoring “the order of Councils in ancient days.”¹ Today, the Church is governed by councils at every level.

In recent months, general Church leaders have counseled together about strengthening Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society Sunday meetings. The result is a new



curriculum titled *Come, Follow Me—For Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society*, which increases the use of general conference messages and extends the power of counseling into our priesthood quorums and Relief Societies.

“Where we were, we’ve done much good,” said Elder Christoffel Golden of the Seventy, who helped direct this change. “But the Lord wants us to move forward. Progress will come as a result of this shift to studying the words of living prophets and sitting in council.”

Recently, the Relief Society General Presidency and members of the Seventy met in council to discuss how counseling invites revelation, increases unity, and brings power. They offer

the following principles, knowing that you will build on these ideas as you discover solutions that are right for you, your ward or branch, and your quorum or Relief Society.

Power in Purpose

“As ye have assembled yourselves together . . . , and are agreed as touching this one thing, and have asked the Father in my name, even so ye shall receive” (D&C 42:3).

Councils are an avenue through which we “collectively seek the Lord’s will.”² In other words, it’s not enough just to share ideas; by counseling together, we invite revelation so we can learn what the Lord wants us to do in our situation. We will have more success in having such a revelatory experience as we remember the following:

1. *Focus—start with a specific, meaningful issue or need.* Focusing on a single issue or need increases our ability to make meaningful progress. Focus also helps us to see beyond visible symptoms (what is happening) and seek for understanding about root causes (why and how something affects people). For example, we might counsel about how to mentor and connect our youth with heaven rather than discussing the time youth spend looking at screens.

2. *Perspectives—frame the issue or need as a question.* A topic phrased as a question can draw out doctrinal insight. We might ask, “How can we address the situation in a helpful and

healing way?” or “What doctrine, if better understood, would help resolve the issue?”

3. *Power—seek revelation.* While councils may brainstorm solutions, the purpose of the council is to discover God’s will, not just to list best practices or to say, “This is how it was done in my last ward.” As Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, we don’t need meetings; we need revelatory experiences.³ Counseling together reveals powerful solutions leading to action.

Power in Participation

“Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege” (D&C 88:122).

In councils, the interests of individuals and the organization—the ward or branch—come together in a unique way, especially if participants understand the following:

1. *Each council member has a vital role.* Council members should actively participate in but not dominate the council. As Paul taught, “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary” (1 Corinthians 12:21–22).



2. *Council members seek to add light.* The Prophet Joseph Smith taught “that every man, before he makes an objection to any item that is brought before a council for consideration, should be sure that he can throw light upon the subject rather than spread darkness, and that his objection be founded in righteousness.”⁴

3. *Council members seek to be unified.* Despite different perspectives, council members unite in seeking to “receive guidance from the Holy Ghost.”⁵ Joseph Smith once said during a council that “to receive revelation and the blessings of heaven it was necessary to have our minds on God and exercise faith and become of one heart and of one mind.”⁶

Power in Action Plans

“Every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him” (D&C 101: 78).

A council is incomplete without plans to act on revelation received. Council participants should be invited to make specific commitments that they will act upon. “At the end of your council, you need to have assignments,” said Sister Jean B. Bingham, Relief Society General President. “The most important work happens between meetings.”

The leader guides the council toward understanding and consensus.

Then he or she leads out in making and recording assignments for later follow-up. Sister Sharon Eubank, First Counselor in the Relief Society General Presidency, adds: “The power is in us. As we bind ourselves to act, the Lord will sanctify our efforts (see D&C 43:9). Volunteering for and reporting back on assignments is the meat of covenant action.”

Role of the Leader

“The preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal” (Alma 1:26).

To improve our councils, we avoid worldly concepts of leadership. In the Lord’s kingdom, the leader is “servant of all” (Mark 10:44). Similarly, the council leader, whether a presiding authority or a teacher, provides focus but is not the focal point. He or she avoids being the dominant voice or taking a position before hearing from the council.

The council leader plays an important role in framing the purpose, facilitating discussion, and inviting participants to make commitments to act. The council functions better as the council leader listens, guides, invites, protects, and validates.

1. *Listen.* Good leaders listen to the speaker and to the Holy Ghost. “I believe the gift of discernment operates more effectively,” said Elder Bednar, “when we’re listening as opposed to when we’re talking.”⁷

2. *Guide.* A council leader guides the conversation, allowing ideas to build. As necessary, the leader reframes the discussion or lovingly redirects it.

3. *Invite.* The Lord scatters revelation among members of a council. Inviting everyone—including the reticent—to offer ideas increases the potential of learning the will of the Lord.

4. *Protect.* A council leader creates an environment for sharing safely and appropriately by caring for those who share and protecting against criticism and judgment. Sensitive topics require careful guidance. Matters that are confidential remain so.

5. *Validate.* As participants share thoughts and ideas, a leader validates input by offering appreciation and connecting related ideas. This



validation helps participants feel part of the revelatory process and stretch themselves to ensure that their input is helpful.

New Curriculum, New Commitment

With this new year and new curriculum comes an era of new commitment. We are blessed with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility and privilege to seek for His guidance and do His work. This step forward in our Sunday Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society meetings isn't about just having a lesson about the work; rather we "sit in council" and promote righteous action—action that will "push many people to Zion with songs of everlasting joy" (D&C 66:11). ■

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, in "Minutes, 17 February 1834," josephsmithpapers.org.
2. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.4.4.
3. See David A. Bednar, "Panel Discussion" (worldwide leadership training meeting, Nov. 2010), broadcasts.lds.org.
4. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 94.
5. *Handbook 2*, 3.3.2.
6. Joseph Smith, in "Minutes, 27–28 December 1832," 3, josephsmithpapers.org.
7. David A. Bednar, "Panel Discussion."

WHAT IS DIFFERENT IN MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD AND RELIEF SOCIETY MEETINGS?

On the first Sunday of each month, discussions in Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society meetings are led by a presidency member or group leader. These meetings are councils in which we "instruct and edify" (D&C 43:8) as we counsel together about issues and needs. These discussions lead to action—both individual and collective.

On other Sundays, we report and follow up on our discussion and assignments. As needed, we make and record new assignments. Discussions during these meetings focus on doctrine taught in general conference messages and special topics selected by general Church leaders and are led by a presidency member, a group leader, or a called teacher. The feelings we have in these discussions inspire us to individual action and change.