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“Be With and Strengthen Them”

Our prayer today is that every man and woman will leave this general conference more deeply committed to heartfelt care for one another.

To paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, the most memorable moments in life are those in which we feel the rush of revelation.¹ President Nelson, I don’t know how many more “rushes” we can handle this weekend. Some of us have weak hearts. But as I think about it, you can take care of that too. What a prophet!

In the spirit of President Nelson’s marvelous declarations and testimonies last night and this morning, I bear my own witness that these adjustments are examples of the revelation that has guided this Church from its beginning. They are yet more evidence that the Lord is hastening His work in its time.²

For all who are eager to learn the details of these matters, please know that immediately upon the conclusion of this session of conference, a sequence will begin that includes, not necessarily in this order, sending a letter from the First Presidency to every member of the Church for whom we have an email address. A seven-page document of questions and answers will be attached for all priesthood and auxiliary leaders. Lastly, those

materials are being posted immediately on ministering.lds.org. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find.”³

Now to the wonderful assignment President Russell M. Nelson has given to me and to Sister Jean B. Bingham. Brothers and sisters, as the work of

quorums and auxiliaries matures institutionally, it follows that we should mature personally as well—individually rising above any mechanical, function-without-feeling routine to the heartfelt discipleship articulated by the Savior at the conclusion of His earthly ministry. As He prepared to leave His still-innocent and somewhat-confused little band of followers, He did not list a dozen administrative steps they had to take or hand them a fistful of reports to be filled out in triplicate. No, He summarized their task in one fundamental commandment: “Love one another; as I have loved you. . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”⁴

In an effort to move us closer to that gospel ideal, this newly announced priesthood and Relief Society ministering concept will include, among other things, the following elements, some of which the Relief Society has already put in place with wonderful success.⁵





- We will no longer use home teaching and visiting teaching language. That is partly because much of our ministering effort will be in settings other than the home and partly because our contact won't be defined by teaching a prepared lesson, though a lesson certainly may be shared if there is need for such. The primary purpose in this ministering idea will be, as was said of the people in Alma's day, to "watch over their people, and . . . nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness."⁶
- We will continue to visit homes as possible, but local circumstances such as large numbers, long distances, personal safety, and other challenging conditions may preclude a visit to every home every month. As the First Presidency counseled years ago, do the best you can.⁷ In addition to whatever schedule you establish for actual visits, that calendar can be supplemented with telephone calls, written notes, texts, emails, video chats, conversations at Church meetings, shared service projects, social activities, and a host of possibilities in the world of social media. However, I should stress that this expansive new view

does not include the sorry statement I recently saw on an automobile bumper sticker. It read, "If I honk, you've been home taught." *Please, please, brethren* (the sisters would never be guilty of that—I speak to the brethren of the Church), with these adjustments we want more care and concern, not less.

- With this newer, more gospel-based concept of ministering, I feel you starting to panic about what counts on the report. Well, relax, because there isn't any report—at least not the 31st-of-the-month, "I made it through the door by the skin of my teeth" report. Here too we are trying to mature. The only report that will be made is the number of interviewing companionships in the ward that quarter. Simple as that sounds, my friends, those interviews are absolutely crucial. Without that information the bishop will have no way to receive the information he needs regarding the spiritual and temporal conditions of his people. Remember: ministering brethren represent the bishopric and elders quorum presidency; they don't replace them. The keys of a bishop and a quorum president go far

beyond this ministering concept.

- Because this report is different from anything you have submitted in the past, let me stress that *we* at Church headquarters don't need to know *how* or *where* or *when* you make contact with your people; we just need to know and care that you *do* make it and that you bless them in every way you can.

Brothers and sisters, we have a heaven-sent opportunity as an entire Church to demonstrate "pure religion . . . undefiled before God"⁸—"to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light" and to "comfort those that stand in need of comfort,"⁹ to minister to the widows and the fatherless, the married and the single, the strong and the distraught, the downtrodden and the robust, the happy and the sad—in short, all of us, every one of us, because we all need to feel the warm hand of friendship and hear the firm declaration of faith. However, I warn you, a new name, new flexibility, and fewer reports won't make an ounce of difference in our service unless we see this as an invitation to care for one another in a bold, new, holier way, as President Nelson has just said. As we lift our spiritual eyes toward living the law of love more universally, we pay tribute to the generations who have served that way for years. Let me note a recent example of such devotion in hopes that legions more will grasp the Lord's commandment to "be with and strengthen"¹⁰ our brothers and sisters.

Last January 14, a Sunday, just a little after 5:00 p.m., my young friends Brett and Kristin Hamblin were chatting at their home in Tempe, Arizona, after Brett's day serving in the bishopric and Kristin's busy day caring for their five children.

Suddenly Kristin, a seemingly successful survivor of breast cancer the previous year, fell unresponsive. A call to 911 brought an emergency team trying desperately to revive her. As Brett prayed and pleaded, he quickly placed just two other telephone calls: one to his mother requesting her help with the children, the other to Edwin Potter, his home teacher. The latter conversation in its entirety went as follows:

Edwin, noting caller ID, said, “Hey, Brett, what’s up?”

Brett’s near-shouted response was “I need you here—now!”

In fewer minutes than Brett could count, his priesthood colleague was standing at his side, helping with the children and then driving Brother Hamblin to the hospital behind the ambulance carrying his wife. There, less than 40 minutes after she had first closed her eyes, the physicians pronounced Kristin dead.

As Brett sobbed, Edwin simply held him in his arms and cried with him—for a long, long time. Then, leaving Brett to grieve with other family members who had gathered, Edwin drove to the bishop’s home to tell him what had just transpired. A marvelous bishop started immediately for the hospital while Edwin drove on to the Hamblins’ home. There he and his wife, Charlotte, who had also come running, played with the five now-motherless Hamblin children, ages 12 down to 3. They fed them an evening meal, held an impromptu musical recital, and helped get them ready for bed.

Brett told me later, “The amazing part of this story isn’t that Edwin came when I called. In an emergency, there are always people willing to help. No, the amazing part of this story is that he was the one I thought of. There were other people around. Kristin has a

brother and sister less than three miles away. We have a great bishop, the greatest. But the relationship between Edwin and me is such that I felt instinctively to call him when I needed help. The Church provides us a structured way to live the second commandment better—to love, serve, and develop relationships with our brothers and sisters that help us move closer to God.”¹¹

Edwin said about the experience, “Elder Holland, the irony in all of this is that Brett has been our family’s home teacher for longer than I have been theirs. Over that time, he has visited us more as a friend than by assignment. He has been a great example, the epitome of what an active and involved priesthood bearer should be. My wife, our boys—we don’t see him as one obligated to bring us a message at the end of each month; we think of him as a friend who lives just down the street and around the corner, who would do anything in this world to bless us. I am



glad I could repay just a little bit of the debt I owe him.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, I join with you in saluting every block teacher and ward teacher and home teacher and visiting teacher who has loved and served so faithfully throughout our history. Our prayer today is that every man and woman—and our older young men and young women—will leave this general conference more deeply committed to heartfelt care for one another, motivated only by the pure love of Christ to do so. In spite of what we all feel are our limitations and inadequacies—and we all have challenges—nevertheless, may we labor side by side with the Lord of the vineyard,¹³ giving the God and Father of us all a helping hand with His staggering task of answering prayers, providing comfort, drying tears, and strengthening feeble knees.¹⁴ If we will do that, we will be more like the true disciples of Christ we are meant to be. On this Easter Sunday, may we love one another as He has loved us,¹⁵ I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (1860), 268.
2. See Doctrine and Covenants 88:73.
3. Luke 11:9.
4. John 13:34–35.
5. See “Keep in Touch with Her Anytime, Anywhere, Any Way,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Jan. 2018, 7.
6. Mosiah 23:18; see also Doctrine and Covenants 20:53.
7. See “Watching Over and Strengthening Members,” First Presidency letter, Dec. 10, 2001.
8. James 1:27.
9. Mosiah 18:8–9.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 20:53.
11. Brett Hamblin, personal correspondence, Feb. 2018.
12. Edwin Potter, personal correspondence, Feb. 2018.
13. See Jacob 5:70–72.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.
15. See John 15:12.