

BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN

# MUTUAL BENEFITS





*What is Mutual for? The benefits are numerous: friendship, gospel instruction, learning to lead, service, and fun.*



### **"On your mark, get set . . ."**

Before Young Women president Malinda Anderson can even finish her sentence, 30 teens from the Rush Valley Ward in Eagle Mountain, Utah, burst out of the meetinghouse double doors. Sprinting from house to house, they go right to work loading dishwashers, sweeping porches, and vacuuming out cars, in what seem like random, chaotic blurs.

What could possibly spur this kind of enthusiasm? A service "scavenger hunt" is what Sister Anderson calls it. The youth are divided into teams to see who can help ward members with safe, uncomplicated household chores—in exchange for food items—in the shortest amount of time. The food items collected will eventually be donated to anonymous needy families within the ward.

Service projects like this and other Mutual activities serve as a backbone for the youth program here in Eagle Mountain. It is a newer town southwest of Salt Lake City, so almost everyone feels like "the new kid."

Mutual helps these teens—and Latter-day Saint teens everywhere—develop friendships and testimonies. Mutual is an important place to gather together during the week and feel the Spirit. It is a time to rest from the cares of the world and enjoy the company of other youth.

### **THE PURPOSE OF MUTUAL**

*"I ask you to do everything you can to create or to provide the circumstances for a spiritual experience in the lives of our Aaronic Priesthood young men and the young women of the Church as well. Nothing we do for them in our various programs will matter as much as that, and I promise you it is what they will remember and treasure the most."*

**Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Bishops and the Aaronic Priesthood," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting, June 2004, 19.**

**Develop friendships and testimonies.**



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN, EXCEPT AS NOTED

### A Time to Gather

Every day you face all sorts of pressures and temptations. Does it ever feel like you're the only one? Charles W. Dahlquist II, Young Men general president, says combating that feeling is one reason why Mutual can be a blessing. "In gathering with those who have similar values, we are reassured that we are not alone," he said in an interview with the *New Era*.

There are many examples in the scriptures where Saints gather together to strengthen each other. Mutual can provide such a refuge. When you gather with other youth and leaders, you will also find many righteous role models.

Susan W. Tanner, Young Women general president, and her counselors, Elaine Dalton and Mary Cook, also shared their feelings about Mutual with the *New Era*. Sister Tanner said gathering to strengthen each other is one of the chief purposes of Mutual. "The youth of the Church need to be together, and they need to feel of each other's goodness and wholesomeness. They need to be in places where they can feel the Spirit."

Mutual allows youth to gather together during the week in a somewhat less formal setting. There isn't a lesson manual to follow. Leaders determine the needs of the youth in their specific areas and plan accordingly. Do you have questions about a gospel principle? Would you like a little help in preparing for college? Talk to your leaders about what you would like to do. Together you can make Mutual an enriching experience.

### Polished and Prepared

Youth are also encouraged to help plan, carry out, and lead Mutual activities. This can be great preparation for the future, especially for those who will serve full-time missions. Brother Dahlquist remembers a leader in Idaho who said that youth need "to learn leadership skills where they plan activities, participate, support, and serve."

Mutual is a place to develop such leadership skills and other talents. In fact, Brother Dahlquist considers it one of the best places to develop these skills outside your own home. At different activities you will find tools that will better prepare you for your future, whether that be college, a mission,

***The youth in the Rush Valley Ward found that Mutual activities are a good way for a newly formed ward to bond in friendship.***



marriage, or all of the above.

You will also strengthen basic communication skills. Sister Cook, second counselor in the Young Women general presidency, stressed the need for these skills. She explained, “I think Mutual was important in my day, but I think it is even more important now since there is less direct social interaction going on.”

Technology is gradually replacing in-person interaction. One night, Sister Cook sat down with some of her grandchildren, and they brought up this subject. They admitted how often they escape speaking, or being kind, or showing manners since they think they can say what they need to simply through text messaging.

Mutual is a fun way to learn good communication skills and develop self-reliance. It might seem like a simple activity—teaching a new dance, learning CPR, or giving service—but you will learn skills that will help you through life.

Sister Dalton, first counselor in the Young Women general presidency, said she still uses skills she learned while attending Mutual. “I was polished, tutored, and prepared. I learned things I couldn’t have learned in any other setting that have made a difference in my life now.”

### Go, and Bring a Friend

Sister Tanner remembered one Tuesday night a few years ago when she was eating dinner with some of her teenagers. One of them said, “Oh, I don’t think I will go to Mutual tonight. They’re not doing anything interesting.” Sister Tanner responded, “You need the Church, but the Church needs you too.”

“I think youth need to understand the impact they can have on other youth,” Sister Cook added. “When you show up in the right spirit, you can contribute to a Beehive, you can help that little Beehive.” One of our responsibilities as Latter-day Saints is to help build the kingdom. We shouldn’t always go to a lesson or an activity thinking about what we can get out of it, but rather what we can give to it.”

Mutual can also be an opportunity to participate in missionary work. It is a great place to invite less-active members or friends of other faiths to feel the Spirit in a casual, less intimidating setting.

Brother Dahlquist told the story of a priesthood leader he met in Uruguay. After talking with him for a minute, Brother Dahlquist discovered that this man went through a period of inactivity in his youth. When Brother Dahlquist asked what happened, this man said, “When I was 12, I received a visit from a deacons quorum president and his counselor, and they invited me to come play soccer at Mutual. And so I went, and I brought some friends for moral support. My friends and I outnumbered the quorum that was there, but we had a great time. After the activity, the quorum president came to me and said, ‘Why don’t you come on Sunday? We’d love to have you.’ The rest is history. I went on a mission. I married in the temple, and I am now serving in the stake presidency.”

Mutual is a wonderful place to fellowship other youth and get them involved. As President Hinckley said, everyone needs a friend, an opportunity to serve, and to be nourished by the good word of God. This is all present at Mutual. Just like the young man in Uruguay, you will see the positive results—however long-term they may be—that can come as a result of attending Mutual. **NE**

**Gather together to strengthen each other.**

**Develop leadership skills and other talents.**

## MAKING THE MOST OF MUTUAL

**S**ometimes, maybe too often, we default to those things that are easiest. We have got to get away from the default. We’ve got to make these activities meaningful and fun.

“If we are focused on meeting the needs: the spiritual, the physical, the emotional, the social, and the intellectual needs of our young people—active and less active—then all of the sudden, the variety brings excitement and difference everywhere.”

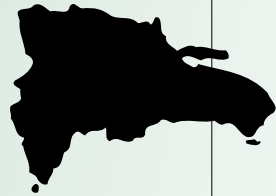
“Those who do really well have a three-month, detailed calendar, and a full year plan. They know when their combined activities are, they know when their youth conference is, they know when their special activities are, and they plan.”

**Charles W. Dahlquist II, Young Men general president**



**Learn good communication skills and develop self-reliance.**

# MUTUAL IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



BY RICHARD M. ROMNEY  
Church Magazines

Sometimes life can be puzzling, but with the help of the gospel life's puzzles are much easier to solve. That was the message of a recent Mutual activity in the Dominican Republic. Youth and leaders were asked to read scripture quotes that provided clues on how to solve some of life's dilemmas. Then as a group they used those clues to put together jigsaw puzzles of scriptural scenes.

Youth throughout the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Ozama Stake say such weeknight activities are beneficial. "Mutual helps me to better understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and to learn how to gain exaltation," says Isabel Antigua, 17, of the Los Mameyes Ward. She also loves Mutual "because I am very

sociable. I like to get together and meet people."

Moroni Castillo, 17, of the Sabana Larga Ward, says "I love Mutual because it's a great opportunity to be with people who share the same high standards that I do, to enjoy learning the gospel together, and to stay strong." He especially likes activities when young men and young women learn together, "because we can share our perspectives about gospel principles. It also helps us to get to know each other in a good way."

He says Mutual activities help LDS youth to see that they are not alone. "Although one by one we may sometimes feel isolated, when we are all together we feel strong." **NE**

## OUT OF IDEAS?

On the right are a few Mutual activity suggestions. The Church also offers a Mutual planning guide online to help you plan activities that will match the needs in your area. Go to [lds.org](http://lds.org), click on the heading Serving in the Church, and go to either the Young Women or Aaronic Priesthood homepage. Scroll down until you see a sidebar entitled Mutual and Activities, and look for a link to “Planning Mutual in Two Easy Steps.”



## ADAPTING ACTIVITIES

In areas where travel to activities involves long distances, where returning home at night might be unsafe, or where Church population is small, local leaders can adapt youth activities to fit their circumstances. In Germany, for example, youth gathered on a Saturday morning for a table tennis (ping pong) tournament. In Tonga, youth cleaned the chapel inside and out and also tidied up the grounds and gardens. And in Ghana, youth gathered in a member's home to sing hymns and talk about worthy music. No matter what country or circumstance the youth were in, they all recognized that by being together they were strengthening each other.



### Future roles/self-reliance

- Do some short role-plays on future roles and parenting skills. Invite a teen to play the role of a parent and another to play the role a son or daughter. Discuss possible solutions to conflicts and make lists of how-to's.
- Learn how to plan menus, especially week-long menus. Prepare corresponding shopping lists.
- Learn how to fill out school, scholarship, or job applications.

### Service

- Make games or create a puppet show to share in the nursery.
- Do a family history project. Teach each person how to fill in a pedigree chart. Find one name to take to the temple. Attend the temple to do the baptisms.
- Serve as a group at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Write to the missionaries and servicemen. If the missionary is serving where packages can easily be received, make some cookies to send along with the letter.
- Support a class member by attending an activity in which he or she is participating, such as a school play or a sports activity.

### For the Strength of Youth/Standards activities

- Have a planned discussion. Pose a question: “What would you do if . . .” Complete the sentence with an issue youth face that would require them to make wise choices. Bring out the consequences of good choices.
- Hang up some *New Era* posters. Divide into groups. Each group receives a bag of props to create a poster using one or more items from the bag. Come back together to share posters. This could be done in conjunction with the Mutual theme for the year. If you come up with a great poster idea, send it to us.
- Have a panel discussion about dating.
- Discuss how to apply the standards in *For the Strength of Youth* to issues such as language, modesty, etc.

### Other

- Have everyone read a few general conference talks. Meet together and divide into small groups to answer questions about the talks. Invite a few to share what they learned.
- Go through “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” Young women highlight concepts that represent each Young Women value, with the appropriate color. Young men highlight concepts that apply to the Aaronic Priesthood and to fatherhood.
- Assign everyone to read an issue of the *New Era*. Meet together and divide into small groups to answer questions about the reading. At the end invite a few to share a lesson they learned.
- Have the ward music leader or a music specialist come to teach how to lead music. Have a sing-along with each person taking a turn to lead.
- Visit museums, art galleries, or libraries. Discuss your own talents and how you might develop them.

### WHERE TO GO FOR EVEN MORE

We ran out of room here, but if you're still searching for more, or if you'd like to share a great idea of your own, go to [www.newera.lds.org](http://www.newera.lds.org). You'll also find a history of Mutual from 1843 to 1977.