The priesthood line of authority exercised by the newest deacon goes back in an unbroken chain to angelic ministers who came from the Son of God Himself.

I wish to add my testimony of—and express my eternal gratitude for—the restoration of the holy priesthood, this hallowed prerogative, this sovereign gift, and the role it plays in our lives on both sides of the veil.

The essential function of the priesthood in linking time and eternity was made explicit by the Savior when He formed His Church during His mortal ministry. To His senior Apostle Peter He said, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Six days later He took Peter, James, and John to a mountaintop where He was transfigured in glory before them. Then prophets from earlier dispensations, including at least
Moses and Elijah, appeared in glory also and conferred the various keys and powers that each held.

Unfortunately those Apostles were soon killed or otherwise taken from the earth, and their priesthood keys were taken with them, resulting in more than 1,400 years of priesthood privation and absence of divine authority among the children of men. But part of the modern miracle and marvelous history is the return of those same heavenly messengers in our day and the restoration of those same powers they held for the blessing of all mankind.

In May of 1829 while translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith came across a reference to baptism. He discussed the matter with his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, and the two earnestly supplicated the Lord regarding the matter. Oliver wrote: “Our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer, to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit. . . . We diligently sought for . . . the authority of the holy priesthood, and the power to administer in the same.”

In response to that “mighty prayer,” John the Baptist came, restoring the keys and powers of the Aaronic Priesthood, which our young men have been given. A few weeks later Peter, James, and John returned to restore the keys and powers of the Melchizedek Priesthood, including the keys of the apostleship. Then when a temple had been built to which other heavenly messengers might come, there unfolded on April 3, 1836, a modern-day equivalent of that earlier Mount of Transfiguration in which the Savior Himself, plus Moses, Elijah, and Elias, appeared in glory to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred keys and powers from their respective dispensations upon these men. That visit was then concluded with this thunderous declaration, “Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands.”

We in the restored Church of Jesus Christ can trace the priesthood line of authority exercised by the newest deacon in the ward, the bishop who presides over him, and the prophet who presides over all of us. That line goes back in an unbroken chain to angelic ministers who came from the Son of God Himself, bearing this incomparable gift from heaven.

And, oh, how we need its blessings—as a Church and as individuals and families within the Church.

From an April 2005 general conference address.

NOTES
2. See Matthew 17:1–3.