

Ward Councils

AT WORK

By LaRene Porter Gaunt

Church Magazines

Latter-day Saints are using ward and branch councils to bless the lives of those in need.



On the night of May 22, 2011, amid the sound of blaring sirens, a massive tornado touched down in the heart of Joplin, Missouri, USA, destroying homes and lives. The Joplin First Ward was hit hard by the twister, but right away Bishop Chris Hoffman and the ward council started accounting for ward members.

“We had a response plan in place because we had talked about these preparations in ward council before they happened,” he said. “We also relied on the Spirit to know what to do. Power lines were down. Cell phones didn’t work. We prayed and listened for answers, and they came—they always came. It was gratifying for me as a bishop to hear members say, ‘This is what I’ve done,’ instead of, ‘What do you want me to do?’”

The response in Joplin shows the power of a united ward council. “The ward council meeting is one of the most important meetings in the Church,” wrote Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “because priesthood quorum and auxiliary leaders can discuss and plan with the bishopric. . . . Of all the councils and committees in the Church, I believe the ward council can have the greatest impact in helping our Father’s children.”¹

LEFT: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY CRAIG DIMOND



United by Love and Faith

In Puerto Francisco de Orellana, an isolated village in the jungles of Ecuador, members have a strong bond of love and faith. The monthly branch council reflects their caring. They focus on individuals and families first, then how programs can help. Inspiration follows.

Many members need help finding work. The branch council finds that the members' challenges can often be solved at the local level. As the council discussed the needs of a single mother with a young daughter who has health problems, the Relief Society president knew of a job where the mother could work and still be near her daughter.

The branch council also draws on Church resources, such as the LDS Employment Services career workshop materials.² They established a class taught by a branch member, which helped another branch member find a better job.

Ricardo Reyes, first counselor in the branch presidency, says of the branch council: "We are instruments in the hand of the Lord. He will achieve His goals through our works."



ESSENTIALS FOR EFFECTIVE COUNCILS

In his book *Counseling with Our Councils*, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gives the following three suggestions:

"First, focus on fundamentals." Follow the guidelines in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, chapter 4, which can be found online in the Serving in the Church section of LDS.org.

"Second, focus on people, not programs." Pursue "the integration of new members, activation of the less active, concerns of the youth, the economic plight of individual members, and the needs of single mothers and widows."

"Third, councils are for counsel and the exchange of ideas, not just reports and lectures." Establish a climate conducive to openness, where every person and group is important and every opinion is valuable." Individuals have different viewpoints and backgrounds, so each can add a helpful perspective to understanding members' needs.

See Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, *Counseling with Our Councils* (1997), 106, 109, 112.



A Path to the Temple

In Liverpool, New York, USA, as Primary president Melissa Fisk attended ward council meeting, she gained insight into its power. When she reached inside her bag for a notebook, she came across a picture of 28 Primary children on the steps of the Palmyra New York Temple. All were covered with wasp stings. For a moment, the picture pulled her attention away from the meeting, and she focused briefly on the day the ward Primary had gone to Palmyra to enjoy the sacred feeling of the temple grounds. Unfortunately, when the children spread out

their blankets, they had accidentally upset a wasps' nest. After everyone had been cared for, the leaders invited the children to touch the temple. The children refused because they were afraid that there might be more wasps. So parents and leaders stood in a line and created a path to the temple. This gave the children courage to move forward. As Melissa turned her attention back to the ward council meeting, she thought, "If only everyone could be surrounded by such loving friends and leaders as they progress toward the temple." Her thoughts were interrupted as she heard the Relief

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE WARD OR BRANCH COUNCIL?

The following priesthood and auxiliary leaders attend the council in two capacities: (1) as ward council members who help the bishop find solutions to the needs and concerns of the ward and (2) as representatives of their

Bishopric

The bishopric is responsible for all ward members, organizations, and activities. The bishop presides over the ward council, but he can make better decisions after discussions with his counselors and with the ward council, when appropriate.

(See Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 4.1; 4.2.)

Ward Clerk

"The ward clerk keeps a record of assignments and decisions made during ward council meetings. . . . He also provides relevant statistical information from Church record-keeping software."

(Handbook 2, 4.6.4.)

Executive Secretary

"The executive secretary prepares agendas for ward council meetings. . . . The bishop may also ask him to help follow up with ward council members on their assignments. . . . [He] can also provide continuity between the ward council and the priesthood executive committee."

(Handbook 2, 4.6.5.)

Melchizedek Priesthood Leaders

The high priests group leader and the elders quorum president are responsible for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the men over whom they preside. The bishop can delegate to quorum and group leaders some of the work he does with families.

(See Handbook 2, 7.)

Ward Mission Leader

The ward mission leader coordinates the ward's efforts to do missionary work. He works with the full-time and ward missionaries. The bishop may ask him to lead discussions on missionary work in ward council meetings.

(See Handbook 2, 5.1.3.)

Society president comment on a sister in need: “She wasn’t at church last Sunday. I’ll make sure her visiting teachers let her know about the upcoming temple trip.”

“They’ve got some hard things going on right now,” added the elders quorum president. “I’ll follow up with their home teachers and see if there’s anything we can do.”

“The young women could help with babysitting,” said the Young Women president.

As Melissa looked at the faces of the members of the ward council, she saw genuine affection and concern. A smile spread across her face. “The Lord *has* prepared ways

for His children to be protected and loved,” she thought. “The ward council!”

Just as in Joplin, Puerto Francisco de Orellana, and Liverpool, Church leaders worldwide continue to discover the blessings of ward and branch councils. As they do, they will harness the extraordinary power of these councils to help the Lord bless His children and accomplish His work. ■

NOTES

1. M. Russell Ballard, *Counseling with Our Councils: Learning to Minister Together in the Church and in the Family* (1997), 102.
2. *The Career Workshop Participant’s Workbook* (item no. 35163) is available through store.lds.org, Distribution Services, or Church employment resource centers.

organizations. They work together in love to serve and strengthen individuals and families in the ward or branch. (References to wards and bishoprics also apply to branches and branch presidencies.)

Relief Society President

The Relief Society president represents the women in the ward over the age of 18. She does all she can to help the women increase their faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and help those in need.

(See *Handbook 2*, 9.)

Young Men President

The Young Men president seeks to strengthen the ward’s young men ages 12 through 18. Assisted by his counselors, he helps the presidency of the Aaronic Priesthood (bishopric) and oversees the Scouting program where it’s available.

(See *Handbook 2*, 8.3.4.)

Young Women President

The Young Women president seeks to strengthen the young women ages 12 through 18. She is responsible to “help each young woman be worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple.”

(*Handbook 2*, 10.1.1.)

Primary President

The Primary president represents the children of the ward ages 18 months through 11 years. Her perspective will be beneficial when the ward council is considering an issue that affects the children of the ward.

(See *Handbook 2*, 11.)

Sunday School President

The Sunday School president is responsible for all gospel instruction during Sunday School. “He comes to ward council meeting prepared to suggest ways members can improve learning and teaching at church and in their homes.”

(*Handbook 2*, 12.2.2.)

To learn more about succeeding in your calling, visit the Leadership Training Library, available in several languages at leadershiplibrary.lds.org.