

2.

Priesthood Principles

The priesthood is the power and authority of God. It has always existed and will continue to exist without end (see Alma 13:7–8; Doctrine and Covenants 84:17–18). Through the priesthood, God created and governs the heavens and the earth. Through this power, He exalts His obedient children, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39; see also Doctrine and Covenants 84:35–38).

In mortality, the priesthood is the power and authority that God gives to man to act in all things necessary for the salvation of God’s children. The blessings of the priesthood are available to all who receive the gospel.

Important scripture passages on the priesthood for leaders to study include Alma 13 and Doctrine and Covenants 13, 20, 84, 107, 121, and 124.

2.1

Priesthood Authority

The priesthood is divided into two parts: the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood.

The Aaronic Priesthood is the lesser priesthood and is “an appendage to . . . the Melchizedek Priesthood” (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:13–14). It is called the Aaronic Priesthood because it was conferred upon Moses’s brother Aaron and Aaron’s sons.

The Aaronic Priesthood includes the keys of the ministering of angels, the gospel of repentance, and baptism by immersion for the remission of sins (see Doctrine and Covenants 13:1; 84:26–27; 107:20). Those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood may be authorized to administer the “outward ordinances” of baptism and the sacrament (see Doctrine and

Covenants 107:14). The bishop is the president of the Aaronic Priesthood in the ward. As part of this responsibility, he administers temporal matters such as welfare and finances in the ward (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:68).

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the higher or greater priesthood. It is present and functional whenever the Church of Jesus Christ is upon the earth in its fulness. It was first called “*the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God*.” But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek Priesthood” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:3–4). Melchizedek was “a great high priest” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:2) who lived during the time of Abraham.

Through the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, Church leaders guide the Church, direct the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, and administer all the spiritual work of the Church (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–22; 107:18). The President of the Church is the presiding high priest over the Melchizedek Priesthood.

When a man receives the Melchizedek Priesthood, he covenants to be faithful, to magnify his callings, and to live by every word of God and His servants (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–44).

2.1.1

Priesthood Keys

Priesthood keys are the authority God has given to priesthood leaders to direct, control, and govern the use of His priesthood on earth. The exercise of priesthood authority is governed by those who hold its keys (see Doctrine and Covenants 65:2; 81:2; 124:123). Those who hold priesthood keys have the

right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction.

Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood pertaining to His Church. He has conferred upon each of His Apostles all the keys that pertain to the kingdom of God on earth. The senior living Apostle, the President of the Church, is the only person on earth authorized to exercise all priesthood keys (see Doctrine and Covenants 43:1–4; 81:2; 107:64–67, 91–92; 132:7).

Seventies act by assignment and by the delegation of authority from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Area Presidents are assigned to administer areas under the authorization of the First Presidency and the Twelve. The Presidency of the Seventy are set apart and are given the keys to preside over the Quorums of Seventy.

The President of the Church delegates priesthood keys to other priesthood leaders so they can preside in their areas of responsibility. Priesthood keys are bestowed on presidents of temples, missions, stakes, and districts; bishops; branch presidents; and quorum presidents. This presiding authority is valid only for the designated responsibilities and within the geographic jurisdiction of each leader's calling. When priesthood leaders are released from their callings, they no longer hold the associated keys.

Counselors to priesthood leaders do not receive keys. They are set apart and function in their callings by assignment and delegated authority.

All ward and stake auxiliary organizations operate under the direction of the bishop or stake president, who holds the keys to preside. Auxiliary presidents and their counselors do not receive keys. They receive delegated authority to function in their callings.

2.1.2

Ordinances

Priesthood authority is required to perform the ordinances of the gospel. An ordinance is a sacred physical act with symbolic meaning, such as baptism, confirmation, or the sacrament. Each ordinance opens the door to rich spiritual blessings. The symbolism helps the participants remember the Father's love, the Son's Atonement, and the Holy Ghost's influence.

Ordinances have always been part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Baptism, for example, was established in the days of Adam and Eve and is practiced in the Lord's Church today. Church members are commanded to gather together often to partake of the sacrament to remember the Savior always and to renew the covenants and blessings of baptism (see Moroni 6:6; Doctrine and Covenants 59:8–9).

Some ordinances are required for exaltation in the celestial kingdom for all accountable persons. These ordinances include baptism, confirmation, Melchizedek Priesthood ordination (for men), the temple endowment, and temple sealing. Living members of the Church receive these saving and exalting ordinances themselves. Deceased persons may receive them vicariously. Vicarious ordinances become effective only when the deceased persons for whom the ordinances were performed accept them in the spirit world and honor the related covenants.

For specific information on performing ordinances and on obtaining necessary authorizations, see chapter 20.

2.1.3

Covenants

All the ordinances necessary for salvation and exaltation are accompanied by covenants with God. A covenant is a sacred and enduring promise between God and His children. God gives the conditions for the covenant, and His children agree to comply with

those conditions. God promises blessings that are conditional on the person faithfully fulfilling the covenant.

As Church members honor and keep their covenants, they are greatly blessed in mortality and become eligible for exaltation (see Exodus 19:3–5; Judges 2:1; 3 Nephi 20:25–27; Moroni 10:33; Doctrine and Covenants 42:78; 97:8).

To prepare an individual for participation in an ordinance, parents, other family members, priesthood and auxiliary leaders, and teachers ensure that the person understands the covenants he or she will make (see Mosiah 18:8–11). After the ordinance, they help him or her keep those covenants (see Mosiah 18:23–26).

2.2

The Purpose of the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized by God to assist in His work to bring to pass the salvation and exaltation of His children. The Church invites all to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32; see also Doctrine and Covenants 20:59). The invitation to come unto Christ pertains to all who have lived, or will ever live, on the earth.

When individuals receive the ordinances of baptism and confirmation, they become members of the Church. The Church supports them and their families by serving as “a refuge from the storm” of worldly influences and wickedness (Doctrine and Covenants 115:6). The Church provides opportunities for service, blessing, and personal growth. The programs and activities of the Church support and strengthen individuals and families.

In fulfilling its purpose to help individuals and families qualify for exaltation, the Church focuses on divinely appointed responsibilities. These include helping members live the gospel of Jesus Christ, gathering Israel through missionary work, caring

for the poor and needy, and enabling the salvation of the dead by building temples and performing vicarious ordinances.

2.3

The Priesthood and the Family

Each husband and father in the Church should strive to be worthy to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. With his wife as an equal partner, he presides in righteousness and love, serving as the family’s spiritual leader. He leads the family in regular prayer and gospel study, including scripture study, and home evening. He works with his wife to teach their children and help them prepare to receive the ordinances of salvation (see Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28). He gives priesthood blessings for direction, healing, and comfort.

Many members do not have faithful Melchizedek Priesthood holders in their homes. Church leaders should give special attention to loving and supporting these members through inspired, watchful care, including assigning ministering brothers and sisters and providing priesthood blessings.

2.4

Use of Priesthood Authority

2.4.1

Receiving Authority

For information about ordaining brethren to priesthood offices, see 20.7. For information about the process of calling, sustaining, and setting apart members to serve in Church callings, see chapter 19.

2.4.2**Delegating Authority**

Priesthood leaders can delegate authority by assigning others to assist them in fulfilling a calling. For information on delegating, see 3.3.4.

2.4.3**Exercising Priesthood Authority Righteously**

The priesthood should be used to bless the lives of others. Effective priesthood leaders preside in love and kindness. They do not try to force their will upon others. Rather, they counsel with others and try to come to a consensus through revelation. The Lord has said that the power of the priesthood cannot be used except in righteousness (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:36). The proper use of the priesthood is by persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, sincere love, and kindness (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:36, 41–42). If a man tries to abuse priesthood power, “the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:37).

2.4.4**Presiding Councils**

Councils provide a means for leaders to come together in unity and faith to collectively seek the Lord’s will. Councils also provide an opportunity to coordinate the work of quorums and auxiliaries. Examples of presiding councils at the local level are stake presidencies, stake councils, bishoprics, and ward councils. For information on how councils function, see 4.1.

2.4.5**Magnifying Priesthood Callings**

Priesthood holders magnify their callings as they minister in their own homes and to other Saints and as they conscientiously fulfill assigned responsibilities. The Lord counseled, “Let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:99). Priesthood holders magnify their callings as they serve with diligence, teach with faith and testimony, and lift, strengthen, and nurture convictions of righteousness in the lives of those for whom they have responsibility.