

4.

The Ward Council

4.1

Councils in the Church

The Lord's Church is governed through councils at the general, area, stake, and ward levels. These councils are fundamental to the order of the Church.

Under the keys of priesthood leadership at each level, leaders counsel together for the benefit of individuals and families. Council members also plan the work of the Church pertaining to their assignments. Effective councils invite full expression from council members and unify their efforts in responding to individual, family, and organizational needs.

4.2

Bishopric

The bishopric has responsibility for all ward members, organizations, and activities. The bishopric usually meets at least weekly. The ward clerk and ward executive secretary attend. For suggested agenda items, see 18.2.6.

The bishop's decisions are better informed and implemented when made after discussions with his counselors and, when appropriate, the ward council. In these discussions the bishop does not share information that he should keep confidential.

4.3

Priesthood Executive Committee

The ward priesthood executive committee (PEC) has been discontinued. Agenda items for PEC meetings are now included in ward council meetings. A sensitive matter could also be addressed in an expanded bishopric meeting that includes the elders quorum president, Relief Society president, or both.

4.4

Ward Council

As the presiding high priest of the ward, the bishop presides over the ward council. This council includes the bishopric, ward clerk, ward executive secretary, and presidents of the elders quorum, Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School.

The ward mission leader (if called; see 5.1.1), the ward temple and family history leader (if called; see 5.4.1), and counselors in the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies may be invited to attend ward council meetings as needed. The bishop may also invite full-time missionaries to meet with the ward council as needed.

Members of the ward council strive to help individuals build testimonies, receive saving ordinances, keep covenants, and become consecrated followers of Jesus Christ (see Moroni 6:4–5). All members of the ward council have a general responsibility for the well-being of ward members. Priesthood and auxiliary leaders also have a specific responsibility to watch over and strengthen each member in their organization.

Typically, the full ward council considers only matters that (1) would benefit from coordination among organizations, (2) would benefit from the discussion and unified efforts of the council, or (3) are of general concern for the ward as a whole. Most matters that are specific to a priesthood or auxiliary organization should be addressed by leaders in that organization, not by the entire ward council. Additionally, individual ward council members may raise sensitive or confidential matters privately with the bishop.

4.5

The Work of the Ward Council

4.5.1

Help Each Individual Progress

Members of the ward council do most of their work outside of ward council meetings. They work with their counselors and with ministering brothers, ministering sisters, and others to care for those in their organizations and others who need assistance.

Ward council members strive to stay informed about the needs, well-being, and spiritual progress of members in their organizations. They also stay informed about members who face special challenges or changing circumstances. This information allows them to strengthen those who most need their help. At the same time, they respect individual and family privacy. Only the bishop deals with matters of personal worthiness.

The following resources can help ward council members be aware of the progress of members and investigators:

1. Reports on member participation, such as the ward's Quarterly Report. These reports are prepared by the ward clerk. They provide information about Church activity, ordinance status, and trends for individuals, age-groups, and the entire ward. In wards that use Church record-keeping software, the clerk can also provide other reports that have helpful information.
2. Information from ministering interviews (see 7.4.4, 9.5.4).
3. New and Returning Member Progress form. Ward council members use this form to plan specific ways to teach and strengthen new members from the time of their baptism and confirmation until they receive the temple endowment. Ward council members may also use this form to plan how to help less-active

members prepare to receive the ordinances that are appropriate for their age, including temple ordinances.

4. Progress Record. Full-time missionaries use this form to record each investigator's progress. Missionaries share this information with the ward mission leader (if called; see 5.1.1) or with the member of the elders quorum presidency who leads missionary work in the ward. He shares this information with the elders quorum and Relief Society presidents, who may report it to the ward council.

4.5.2

Help Strengthen the Ward

Members of the ward council work together to build spiritual strength and unity in the ward. The ward council also oversees the planning of activities for the ward. Activities should be planned to fulfill gospel-centered purposes. For more information about activities, see chapter 13.

4.6

Ward Council Meetings

The ward council normally meets weekly but may meet less frequently. The meeting usually does not last longer than one hour.

The bishop presides over the meeting. If he is absent, he may assign a counselor to preside. However, major decisions are not made in the bishop's absence.

4.6.1

Guiding Principles

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders attend ward council meetings in two capacities: (1) as ward council members who help the bishop address needs and concerns in the ward and find solutions and (2) as

representatives of their organizations. These leaders seek the guidance of the Holy Ghost as they unite in love and concern for those they serve.

Ward council meetings should focus on matters that will strengthen individuals and families. The council spends minimal time on calendaring, activity planning, and other administrative business.

During the meeting, the bishop explains each matter being considered, but he does not normally decide how to resolve the matter until he has heard the discussion. He encourages discussion without dominating it. He asks questions and may ask particular council members for their suggestions. He listens carefully before making a decision. These discussions should foster a spirit of inspiration.

Council members are encouraged to speak honestly, both from their personal experience and from their positions as organization leaders. Both men and women should feel that their comments are valued as full participants. The bishop seeks input from Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary leaders in all matters considered by the ward council. The viewpoint of women is sometimes different from that of men, and it adds essential perspective to understanding and responding to members' needs.

After open discussion, the bishop may make a decision, or he may wait to discuss the matter further with his counselors. After he makes a decision, council members should support it in a spirit of unity and harmony.

If council members have strongly unsettled feelings about an important decision, the bishop may wait for another council meeting to consider the matter further and seek spiritual confirmation and unity.

Council members must keep confidential any private or sensitive information about members, families, and subjects that are discussed.

4.6.2

Sample Agenda

Under the bishop's direction, the executive secretary prepares an agenda for ward council meeting. The bishop invites council members to contact the executive secretary to place items on the agenda. The executive secretary may also suggest agenda items, including those from previous meetings that may need additional discussion or follow-up. The executive secretary may also prepare a calendar of upcoming ward events for council members to review.

A list of items that could be included on the agenda is provided below. The bishop should not try to consider all of these items in every meeting. Instead, he prioritizes each meeting's agenda to address the most important matters first. Rather than discussing too many subjects in a superficial way, it is better to focus on a few that will bless the most individuals and families. The bishop relies on inspiration to know which subjects matter most at a particular time.

1. **Report on assignments.** Brief reports on assignments from the last meeting.
2. **Spiritual and temporal welfare.** Discuss the spiritual and temporal well-being of selected individuals and families and how their needs are being met through ministering. Make plans to help meet needs, including long-term needs. Discuss how to strengthen individuals and families and to support ministering brothers and sisters in their efforts. For more information, see 6.2.2.
3. **Missionary.** Develop and review the ward mission plan (see 5.1.8). Using the Progress Record, review baptismal candidates and currently progressing investigators. The bishop may invite the ward mission leader to attend and lead this review (if called; see 5.1.1), or he may invite the member of the elders quorum presidency who leads missionary work to do so. For more information, see 5.1.2.

4. **Convert retention.** Review the progress of each new member listed on the New and Returning Member Progress form; plan ways to help them continue progressing (see 5.2.3). For information on limited-use temple recommends and priesthood ordination for new converts, see 5.2.2.
5. **Activation.** Review the progress and fellowshipping of less-active members listed on the New and Returning Member Progress form; plan ways to help them continue progressing (see 5.3.2).
6. **Temple and family history.** Review the progress of individual members who are preparing to receive the ordinances of the temple. As the bishop senses the need, discuss how to encourage members to participate more fully in temple and family history work. The bishop may invite the ward temple and family history leader (if called; see 5.4.1) to attend and lead this review, or he may invite the member of the elders quorum presidency assigned to temple and family history work to do so. For more information, see 5.4.2.
7. **Gospel learning and teaching.** Discuss how to improve gospel learning and teaching in Church settings and in the home (see 5.5.2). Also discuss how to improve the effectiveness of teacher council meetings.
8. **Organization reports.** Reports on the work of the elders quorum and the auxiliary organizations. This part of the meeting should be brief so it does not distract from the council's main focus on individuals.
9. **Planning.** Calendar and activity planning to help meet the spiritual, temporal, and social needs of ward members (see chapter 13).
10. **Perpetual Education Fund** (where the program is approved). Review the progress of participants in the program.
11. **Concluding instruction** from the bishopric.

4.6.3

Undertaking a Course of Action

The ward council seeks inspiration in developing a course of action to bless the lives of members. The council's focus is on helping people, not administering programs.

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders use their own leadership meetings to review ward council decisions and enlist the help of others in their organization to fulfill council assignments.

When undertaking a course of action, council members should be careful to avoid overburdening individuals and families (see Mosiah 4:27; Doctrine and Covenants 10:4). Each member's first priority is to his or her family. The ward council ensures an appropriate balance between the member's family obligations and his or her responsibilities in the Church.

Ward council members regularly evaluate each course of action and report on their assignments. In most instances, progress will require sustained attention and follow-up assignments.

4.6.4

Responsibilities of the Ward Clerk

The ward clerk keeps a record of assignments and decisions made during ward council meetings. He makes sure that information used by the ward council is accurate and timely. He provides the most recent copies of the New and Returning Member Progress form. He also provides relevant statistical information from Church record-keeping software. He takes initiative to inform the bishopric and ward council members about information he finds in these sources rather than waiting for them to ask him.

Other responsibilities of the ward clerk are outlined in *Handbook 1*, 13.4.2.

4.6.5**Responsibilities of the Executive Secretary**

The executive secretary prepares agendas for ward council meetings as outlined in 4.6.2. The bishop may also ask him to help follow up with ward council members on their assignments. In addition, the bishop may ask him to obtain reports from ward council members on the status of investigators, new members, members returning to activity, and other matters.

Other responsibilities of the ward executive secretary are outlined in *Handbook 1*, 13.4.4.

4.7**Preventing and Responding to Abuse**

In stake and ward council meetings, stake presidencies and bishoprics regularly review Church policies and guidelines on preventing and responding to abuse. They teach the key messages in “Preventing and Responding to Abuse,” an enclosure to the First Presidency letter dated March 26, 2018 (see ministeringresources.ChurchofJesusChrist.org). They invite discussion from council members. Leaders and council members should seek the guidance of the Spirit as they teach and discuss this sensitive subject.

Council members should also watch and discuss the video *Protect the Child: Responding to Child Abuse* (see ministeringresources.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

Council members then discuss this material in their presidency meetings and, as needed, with others.

Often a report of abuse will come to a trusted teacher or adviser. Members of stake and ward councils help leaders, teachers, and members take proper steps in preventing and responding to abuse, including reporting the abuse to appropriate civil authorities.