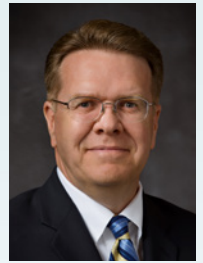




Fishers OF MEN



By Elder
Scott D. Whiting
Of the Seventy

*All who have accepted the call to lead
in the Church have accepted the Savior's
invitation to become fishers of men.*

While raising our young family in Hawaii, my wife and I were grateful for the wonderful Latter-day Saints who assisted us. These dear members embraced us and treated us as their own family. On several occasions men in the ward would take my young son on ocean fishing adventures. These excursions did not involve boats but rather ancient fishing techniques developed by the early Hawaiians.

Using one such method, a skilled fisherman would meticulously fold and layer a circular net that had weights attached to the perimeter. He would then carefully carry the net to a location along the rocky shore above a clear pool of water. As he would see fish entering the pool, at just the right time and with great skill, he would throw the net, which would unfold to its full capacity and land in a large circular pattern on the water below, quickly sinking to the bottom and enmeshing the gathered fish.

While the skill of any such fisherman is impressive, he will be the first to

tell you that without a good net that is clean, mended, and in full repair, his efforts would be futile. Experienced fishermen know that their success is contingent upon the integrity of their fishing nets and that effective, productive fishing does not begin until the nets are inspected and in good order.

We see an understanding of this principle among the original Apostles, several of whom were fishermen by trade. We are introduced to these fishermen in the early chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where they are casting, mending, and washing their nets when they first encounter their future Master (see Matthew 4:18, 21; Mark 1:16, 19; Luke 5:2). These men fed their families and the families of others by toiling daily to catch fish. Their fortunes and their families depended on their preparation and skill and on the integrity of their nets.

When Jesus invited them to “follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” “they straightway left their nets,” “forsook all, and followed him” (Matthew 4:19, 20; Luke 5:11; see also Mark 1:17–18).

I have thought of this example many times as I have considered that those who stand at the head of the Church have responded with similar faith to the invitation to “follow me.” Like the ancient Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is led by prophets and apostles, who have forsaken their nets and their hard-earned professions and have developed new skills in order to serve and follow the Master.

Leaders of Men

What does it mean to become “fishers of men”? In His simple words of invitation to the early Apostles, the Savior introduced what was to become His common and powerful form of teaching—teaching in parables. He knew that those called to follow Him would understand, to a degree, what He meant by the words “fishers of men.”

President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught, “To become ‘fishers of men’ is just another way of saying ‘become leaders of men.’ So in today’s language we would say . . . : ‘If you will keep my commandments, I will make you leaders among men.’”¹

A leader of men is someone who is called to help others become “true followers of . . . Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48). *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* says, “To do this, leaders first strive to be the Savior’s faithful disciples, living each day so that they can return to live in God’s presence. Then they can help others develop strong testimonies and draw nearer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.”²

All who have accepted the call to lead in the Church have accepted the Savior’s invitation to become fishers of men.

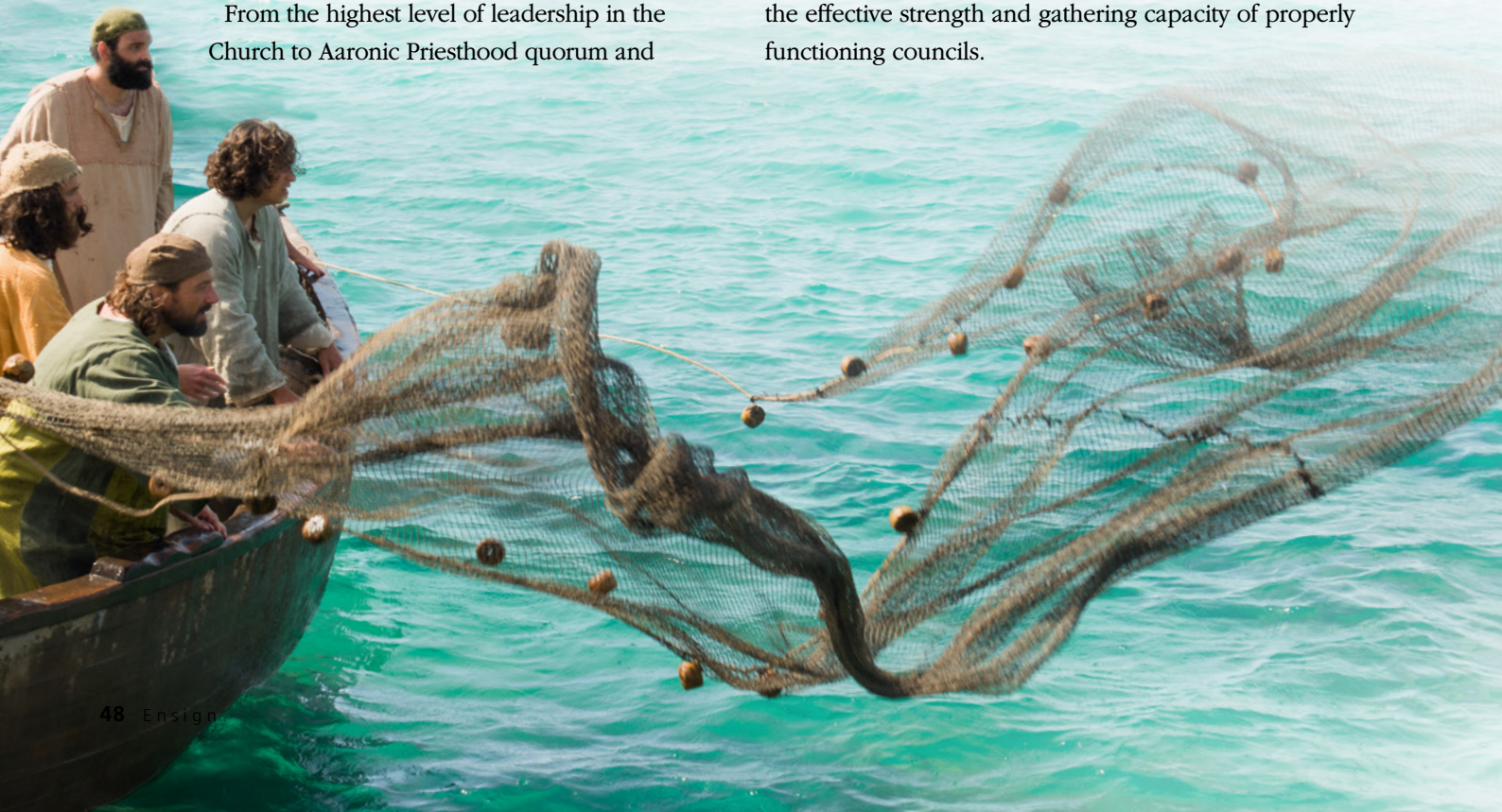
Nets and Councils

From the highest level of leadership in the Church to Aaronic Priesthood quorum and

Young Women class presidencies, leaders are organized into councils. Leaders are instructed to prepare spiritually, participate fully in councils, minister to others, teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and administer the priesthood and auxiliary organizations of the Church. Additionally, they are to build unity and harmony in the Church, prepare others to be leaders and teachers, delegate responsibility, and ensure accountability.³

Just as the early Apostles applied their knowledge of fishing to become fishers of men, we can apply the principles found in their use of nets to the councils of the Church. Like a net, these councils are organized and prepared to gather Heavenly Father’s children—each council member acting as an important and integral strand of the net. Just as a net is effective only if it is in good repair, so are our councils compromised when council members are not organized, focused, and functioning as they should.

Leaders of councils follow the example of the ancient Apostle fishermen by regularly inspecting and mending these “nets.” Council leaders do so by providing regular training, leading out in council meetings, giving timely and appropriate feedback to council members, and offering love, encouragement, and praise. There is no substitute for the effective strength and gathering capacity of properly functioning councils.



The Ward Council

Perhaps the council with the greatest opportunity to influence individual members of the Church is the ward council. Men and women in this council are truly called to be fishers of men with the charge of leading the work of salvation in the ward, as directed by the bishop. They live and serve in their respective wards, where they can know and associate with those they have been called to lead.

“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.”⁴

Members of ward councils play an integral role in hastening the work of salvation. When the ward council is not functioning as it should, the work slows. The gathering capacity of the “net” is compromised, and council efforts yield limited results. But when the ward council is organized and focused on strengthening individuals and families, the results can be astonishing.

I am familiar with a ward that struggled with an ineffective ward council. It was difficult for the bishop to embrace the direction found in *Handbook 2* because he was comfortable in his ways and liked his old patterns. After much counseling and training by a loving stake president, however, the bishop softened his heart, repented, and began in earnest to organize the ward council as instructed. He watched training videos available at LDS.org, he read sections 4 and 5 of *Handbook 2*, and he acted upon what he learned.

Members of the ward council quickly embraced the changes, and a spirit of love and unity settled on them as they focused on strengthening individuals and families. In every meeting, they spoke at length about investigators, new converts, less-active members, and members with needs. Their hearts began to be drawn out to these brothers and sisters, and miracles began to happen.

The bishop reported that almost immediately after these changes were made to the ward council, previously unknown less-active members began to attend church. These members said they suddenly felt moved upon to return to the Church. They said they had received a clear



JOIN THE RANKS

“During the Master’s ministry, He called fishermen at Galilee to leave their nets and follow Him, declaring, ‘I will make you fishers of men.’ May we join the ranks of the fishers of men and women, that we might provide whatever help we can.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “Our Responsibility to Rescue,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2013, 4.

and compelling impression that they needed to once again associate with the Saints. They knew they would be loved and that they needed the support members would offer.

The bishop shared with me that he is certain Heavenly Father was just waiting for him to follow the counsel he had received and organize the ward council as instructed before He could put the desire into the hearts and minds of these less-active members to return to activity in the Church. The bishop realized that he needed to create the loving, nurturing environment these members needed before the Spirit would lead them back. His words remind me of the experience of Peter the fisherman:

“And [Jesus] entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

“Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

“And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes” (Luke 5:3–6).

As we listen to and follow the counsel given us by modern-day prophets, seers, and revelators—true “fishers of men”—and as we inspect and mend our nets while serving, our capacity to hasten the work of salvation will be greatly increased and we will become instruments in Heavenly Father’s hands to gather His children. ■

NOTES

1. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1960, 15.
2. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 3.1.
3. See *Handbook 2*, 3.2.1–5; 3.3.2–4.
4. *Handbook 2*, 4.4.