



BY ELDER QUENTIN L. COOK  
*Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*

# Adjustments to Strengthen Youth

*More young men and young women will rise to the challenge and stay on the covenant path because of this laser-like focus on our youth.*

Thank you, dear President Nelson, for that joyful revelatory guidance with respect to witnesses at baptisms and the direction you have asked us to share to help strengthen youth and develop their sacred potential.

Before I share those adjustments, we express our sincere appreciation for the exceptional way members have responded to developments in the ongoing Restoration of the gospel. As President Nelson suggested last year, you have taken your vitamins!<sup>1</sup>

You joyfully study *Come, Follow Me* at home.<sup>2</sup> You have also responded to adjustments at church. Members of the elders quorum and Relief Society sisters unitedly do the work of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Our gratitude is overflowing.<sup>4</sup> We are particularly grateful that our youth continue to remain strong and faithful.

Our youth live in an exciting but also challenging time. The choices available have never been more dramatic. One example: the modern smartphone provides access to incredibly important and uplifting information, including family history and the holy scriptures. On the other hand, it contains

foolishness, immorality, and evil not readily available in the past.

To help our youth navigate this maze of choices, the Church has prepared three profound and comprehensive initiatives. First, curriculum has been strengthened and expanded to the home. Second, a children and youth program that includes exciting activities and personal development was presented just last Sunday by

President Russell M. Nelson, President M. Russell Ballard, and the General Officers. A third initiative is organizational changes to make youth a more significant focus of our bishops and other leaders. This focus must be spiritually powerful and help our youth become the youth battalion President Nelson has asked them to become.

## Interlocking Patterns

These efforts, together with those announced during the last few years, are not isolated changes. Each of the adjustments is an integral part of an interlocking pattern to bless the Saints and prepare them to meet God.

One part of the pattern relates to the rising generation. Our youth are being asked to take more individual responsibility at younger ages—without parents and leaders taking over what youth can do for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

## Announcement

Today we announce organizational changes for youth at ward and stake levels. As President Nelson explained, Sister Bonnie H. Cordon will discuss



changes for young women this evening. One purpose for the changes I will now discuss is to strengthen Aaronic Priesthood holders, quorums, and quorum presidencies. These changes align our practice with Doctrine and Covenants 107:15, which reads, “The bishopric is the presidency of this [Aaronic] priesthood, and holds the keys or authority of the same.”

One of the scriptural duties of the bishop is to preside over the priests and to sit in council with them, teaching them the duties of their office.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the first counselor in the bishopric will have specific responsibility for teachers and the second counselor for deacons.

Accordingly, to align with this revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, Young Men presidencies at the ward level will be discontinued. These faithful brethren have done much good, and we express appreciation to them.

It is our hope that bishoprics will give great emphasis and focus to the priesthood responsibilities of young men and help them in their quorum duties. Capable adult Young Men advisers will be called to assist the Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies and the bishopric in their duties.<sup>7</sup> We are confident that more young men and young women will rise to the challenge and stay on the covenant path because of this laser-like focus on our youth.

In the Lord’s inspired pattern, the bishop has responsibility for everyone in the ward. He blesses the parents of youth as well as the youth. One bishop found that as he counseled with a young man struggling with pornography, he could help the young man in his repentance only as he helped the parents react with love and understanding. The young man’s healing

was a healing for his family and was possible through the bishop working in behalf of the entire family. The young man has now become a worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holder and full-time missionary.

As this account suggests, these adjustments will:

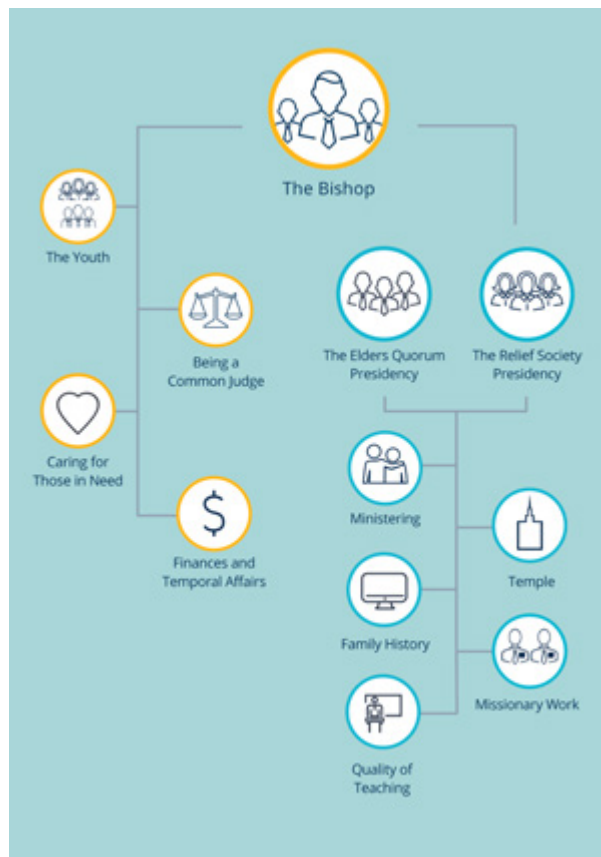
- Help bishops and their counselors focus on their core responsibilities to the youth and Primary children.
- Place the power and duties of the Aaronic Priesthood at the center of every young man’s personal life and goals.

These adjustments also:

- Emphasize the responsibilities of Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies and their direct reporting line to the bishopric.
- Motivate adult leaders to assist and mentor Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidencies in magnifying the power and authority of their office.

As noted, these adjustments do not lessen the bishopric’s responsibility for *young women*. As President Nelson just taught, “[The bishop’s] first and foremost responsibility is to care for the young men and *young women* of his ward.”<sup>8</sup>

How will our beloved and hard-working bishops fulfill this responsibility? As you remember, in 2018 Melchizedek Priesthood quorums were adjusted to work even more closely with Relief Societies so that elders



quorums and Relief Societies can, under the direction of the bishop, help shoulder important responsibilities that previously consumed much of his time. These responsibilities include missionary work and temple and family history work in the ward<sup>9</sup>—as well as much of the ministering to ward members.

The bishop *cannot* delegate some responsibilities, such as strengthening the youth, being a common judge, caring for those in need, and overseeing finances and temporal affairs. These are, however, fewer than we may have understood in the past. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained last year when the adjustments to the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums were announced: “The bishop remains, of course, the presiding high priest of the ward. This new alignment [of elders quorums and Relief Societies] should let him preside over the work of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Relief Society *without requiring him to do the work of either of those bodies.*”<sup>10</sup>



For instance, a Relief Society president and an elders quorum president, as assigned, can take a greater role in counseling with adults—*as can a Young Women president in counseling with young women*. While only the bishop can serve as a common judge, these other leaders are also entitled to revelation from heaven to help with challenges that do not require a common judge or involve abuse of any kind.<sup>11</sup>

That doesn't mean a young woman cannot or should not talk to the bishop or to her parents. Their focus is the youth! But it does mean that a Young Women leader may best meet the needs of an individual young woman. The bishopric is as concerned for young women as for young men, but we recognize the strength that comes from having strong, engaged, and focused Young Women leaders who love and mentor, not taking over the roles of class presidencies but helping youth succeed in those roles.

Sister Cordon will share additional exciting changes for young women tonight. I, however, announce that ward Young Women presidents will

now report to and counsel directly with the bishop of the ward. In the past, this assignment could be delegated to a counselor, but going forward, young women will be a direct responsibility of the one who holds presiding keys for the ward. The Relief Society president will continue to report directly to the bishop.<sup>12</sup>

At the general and stake levels, we will continue to have Young Men presidencies. At the stake level, a high councilor will be the Young Men president<sup>13</sup> and will, with the high councilors assigned to Young Women and Primary, be part of the stake Aaronic Priesthood–Young Women committee. These brethren will work with the stake Young Women presidency on this committee. With a counselor to the stake president as chair, this committee will have increased importance because many of the programs and activities in the new Children and Youth initiative will be at the stake level.

These high councilors, under the direction of the stake presidency, can serve as a resource to the bishop and Aaronic Priesthood quorums in a

manner similar to the service provided by high councilors to ward elders quorums.

As a related matter, another high councilor will serve as the stake Sunday School president and, as needed, could serve on the stake Aaronic Priesthood–Young Women committee.<sup>14</sup>

Additional organizational changes will be further explained in information sent to leaders. These changes include:

- The bishopric youth committee meeting will be replaced by a ward youth council.
- The word “Mutual” will be retired and become “Young Women activities,” “Aaronic Priesthood quorum activities,” or “youth activities,” which will be held weekly where possible.
- The ward budget for youth activities will be divided equitably between the young men and young women according to the number of youth in each organization. A sufficient amount will be provided for Primary activities.
- At all levels—ward, stake, and



general—we will use the term “organization” rather than the term “auxiliary.” Those who lead the General Relief Society, Young Women, Young Men, Primary, and Sunday School organizations will be known as “General Officers.” Those who lead organizations at the ward and stake levels will be known as “ward officers” and “stake officers.”<sup>15</sup>

The adjustments announced today may begin as soon as branches, wards, districts, and stakes are ready but should be in place by January 1, 2020. These adjustments, when combined and integrated with previous adjustments, represent a spiritual and organizational effort consistent with doctrine to bless and strengthen every man, woman, youth, and child, helping each to follow the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as we progress on the covenant path.

Dear brothers and sisters, I promise and testify that these comprehensive adjustments, under the direction of an inspired president and prophet, Russell M. Nelson, will empower and strengthen every member of the Church. Our youth will develop greater faith in the Savior, be protected from the temptations of the adversary, and stand prepared to meet life’s challenges. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

#### NOTES

1. See Russell M. Nelson, in “Latter-day Saint Prophet, Wife and Apostle Share Insights of Global Ministry,” Newsroom, Oct. 30, 2018, newsroom.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
2. In addition, you have made specific efforts to use the correct name of the Church as taught by President Russell M. Nelson and to remember our Savior with love and reverence as you do so.
3. “Members of the Church of Jesus Christ are sent forth ‘to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men’ (Doctrine and Covenants 138:56). This work of salvation includes member missionary work, convert retention, activation of less-active members,



temple and family history work, and teaching the gospel. The bishopric directs this work in the ward, assisted by other members of the ward council” (*Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 5.0, ChurchofJesusChrist.org).

4. As leaders, we love the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for your goodness and your discipleship. We pay tribute to the individuals, the moms, the dads, the youth, and the children who are walking the covenant path—and doing so with dedication and joy.
5. In 2019, 11-year-old deacons began passing the sacrament, and 11-year-old young women and young men received limited-use temple recommends. Last year, President Nelson challenged our young men and young women to be part of a youth battalion to gather scattered Israel on both sides of the veil (see “Hope of Israel” [worldwide devotional for youth, June 3, 2018], HopeofIsrael.ChurchofJesusChrist.org). The response has been dramatic. Full-time missionaries now serve in an exceptional way at younger ages. Since October 6, 2012, young men have been eligible to serve at 18 years of age and young women at 19 years of age.
6. “Also the duty of the president over the Priesthood of Aaron is to preside over [the] priests, and sit in council with them, to teach them the duties of their office. . . . This president is to be a bishop; for this is one of the duties of this priesthood” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:87–88).
7. Adult leaders will also be called as Aaronic Priesthood quorum specialists to assist with programs and activities and to attend quorum meetings so that the bishopric can regularly visit Young Women classes and activities and occasionally visit Primary. Some specialists could be called to assist with a particular event, such as a camp; others could be called on a longer-term basis to assist the quorum advisers. There will always be at least two adult men in each quorum meeting, program, or activity. While roles and titles will change, we do not anticipate a decrease in the number of adult men serving

- and supporting Aaronic Priesthood quorums.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “Witnesses, Aaronic Priesthood Quorums, and Young Women Classes,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 39, emphasis added; see also Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Young Women of the Church,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 85.
9. We are also advising bishops to spend more time with young single adult members and their own families.
10. Jeffrey R. Holland, general conference leadership meeting, Apr. 2018; see also “Effective Ministering,” ministering.ChurchofJesusChrist.org. Elder Holland taught that responsibilities the bishop cannot delegate are presiding over the Aaronic Priesthood quorums and the young women, being a common judge, watching over the finances and temporal affairs of the Church, and caring for the poor and needy. The elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies and others can take primary responsibility for missionary work, temple and family history work, the quality of teaching in the ward, and watching over and ministering to members of the Church.
11. In addition to circumstances requiring the keys of a common judge, issues of abuse of any kind should be handled by bishops in accordance with Church policy.
12. The stake Relief Society president will also continue to report directly to the stake president.
13. The stake Young Men president’s counselors may be called from the membership of the stake or, as needed, may be the high councilor assigned to the Young Women and the high councilor assigned to the Primary.
14. The brother who serves as Sunday School president has significant responsibility for youth curriculum on two Sundays each month.
15. The presidencies of the Relief Society, Young Women, Young Men, Sunday School, and Primary at the general and stake levels are General Officers or stake officers. At the ward level, the bishopric leads the young men, so Aaronic Priesthood quorum advisers are not ward officers.