

A New Direction for Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society Sunday Meetings

The new curriculum brings exciting changes to our Sunday meetings that build on Teaching in the Savior's Way. Our first-Sunday meeting will be a time to counsel together about our responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges as we do the work of the Lord. On other Sundays, instead of a new Teachings of Presidents of the Church manual, we will focus on teaching messages from the most recent general conference and a topic selected by our general Church leaders. But these changes aren't just the topics we will study—the new curriculum also affects how we prepare, teach, counsel and learn together, and receive and act on inspiration. Members and leaders in Mexico and in Utah, California, and Georgia in the United States participated in a test of the new materials. Here are some of their insights and experiences:

“**W**hat will I do without a manual?” thought Nancy Feragen, a Relief Society teacher, when she first reviewed a copy of *Come, Follow Me—For Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society*. “At first, I panicked,” she admitted. “Then the thought came to me: The Lord wants us to take more responsibility for our own learning and increase our spirituality as brothers and sisters in the gospel.”

“It is a little scary to trust in the Lord and come prepared to lead a discussion without lots of material,” said Linda Harmon, a Relief Society president, “but once you do it—if you have prepared yourself through prayer, study, going to the temple, and whatever else you are inspired to do—it is amazing.”

TEACHING IN THE SAVIOR'S WAY

“One challenge with the new curriculum is getting people not to teach ‘the

old way,’” said Bishop Boyd Roberts. “We’ve got to stop simply disseminating information, get out of the way, and let the Spirit teach.”

“It’s a new way of teaching that might be difficult for some people,” said Lisa Smith, a Relief Society president, referring to *Teaching in the Savior's Way*. “That’s why it’s important to model good teaching methods and encourage leaders to consistently attend teacher council meetings with the teachers,” she said.

PREPARING AND TEACHING

David Mickelson, a high priest group teacher, said that the phrase “teach ye diligently” in Doctrine and Covenants 88:78 “has to do with our preparation beforehand and our ability to diligently follow the Spirit while we’re teaching. If we teach diligently, the Savior’s grace will attend us and we will be taught more perfectly. I think that’s the Lord’s perfect way of teaching. The teacher—the person leading the discussion—has to be willing to be taught by the Spirit.”

Adam Bushman, an elders quorum teacher, prepared for lessons by reviewing the selected general conference



talk, then prayerfully considering which concepts are most important for the quorum. “To help the men have more time to ponder,” he explains, “an email goes out during the week that says, ‘This is a talk we’re going to be discussing and we’d like you to consider the following questions.’”

COUNSELING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

“Sundays in Relief Society are no longer just the responsibility of the leaders,” said Brooke Jensen, a counselor in a Relief Society presidency. “Each member takes an active role.”

Brother Bushman felt that sitting in a circle made a difference. “I love it,” he said. “It changes the nature of the conversation. It changes people’s expectations. Now there’s a lot more participation. Instead of the two or three brethren who usually answer the question, new people are commenting.”

When Rebecca Siebach, a Relief Society sister, first heard about the new focus on councils, she immediately thought of friends who had become less active. “I knew their concerns,” she said. “They had been open with me about their insecurities and struggles to come to church, and I thought, this is the perfect opportunity to reach out to them and say, ‘We need you in our council! Please come and share!’”

“When I finally spoke up during a council meeting,” said LonaMarie Cook, a counselor in a Relief Society presidency, “it was awesome to have people validate what I was thinking and to be a part of that community.”

RECEIVING AND ACTING ON INSPIRATION

“We’re creating an environment for the Spirit to teach and for us to hear and listen,” said Bishop Roberts. “The Spirit

then becomes the teacher, showing us what we need to do in our personal lives, families, and callings. What we do as a result of those promptings is what leads to true conversion and service.”

Susan Farr, a Relief Society president, said, “This method pushes us to get up and do, not just walk away from the lesson thinking ‘that was inspiring’ but then soon forgetting it. Counseling together helps us see that the learning and actions belong to all of us—not just the teacher.”

“As we record our impressions and then act upon them, we exercise a change of heart and become better servants of the Lord,” said Susan Mitchell, a counselor in a Relief Society presidency.

“Knowing that you are going to be held accountable for something and that someone is going to ask you how you felt,” said Sister Smith, “makes you an active participant in building your testimony.”

Landen Roundy, a high priests group leader, said emailing notes of what was discussed and planned “helps members recognize experiences they’re having during the week that they might want to share the following Sunday.”

“From those notes,” Bishop Roberts added, “I’ve seen a continued spirit of sharing and learning throughout the week as the brethren discuss through email additional thoughts and feelings, strengthening their quorum.”

“The Lord wants us to turn our hearts to one another and that can be done when we meet with purpose,” concluded Sister Siebach. “This new curriculum helps us identify topics of interest, set goals, look to the right source for answers, receive personal revelation, and be edified by one another as we turn to living prophets for the answers we need in our day.” ■

HOW CAN WE PREPARE?

The new *Come, Follow Me* resources for Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society meetings will be used throughout the Church beginning in January 2018. So what can Church units do to prepare for this change?

- Spend some time in an upcoming ward council looking over the resources together and discussing what may be different. What benefits will come?
- Invite the ward council to suggest topics for first-Sunday council meetings that will help meet the needs of the ward or branch. Priesthood and Relief Society leaders can decide when and how their organizations will address these needs.
- Introduce and discuss the new resources during an upcoming quorum, group, or Relief Society meeting. What can each member do to be prepared for these changes?
- Encourage priesthood and Relief Society teachers and leaders to attend teacher council meetings to share and discuss their experiences, challenges, and questions about the new resources.