

Priesthood

The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God. Through the priesthood God created and governs the heavens and the earth. Through this power He redeems and exalts His children, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

Priesthood Authority Given to Men on Earth

God gives priesthood authority to worthy male members of the Church so they can act in His name for the salvation of His children. Priesthood holders can be authorized to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of salvation, and govern the kingdom of God on the earth.

Male members of the Church may begin their priesthood service when they reach the age of 12. They begin by holding the Aaronic Priesthood, and they later may qualify to have the Melchizedek Priesthood conferred on them. At different stages in their lives and as they prepare themselves to receive different responsibilities, they hold different offices in the priesthood, such as deacon, teacher, or priest in the Aaronic Priesthood and elder or high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood. (For specific information about the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, see pages 3–4 and 101–2.)

For a male member of the Church to hold the priesthood, an authorized priesthood holder must confer it on him and ordain him to an office in that priesthood (see Hebrews 5:4; D&C 42:11; Articles of Faith 1:5).

Although the authority of the priesthood is bestowed only on worthy male members of the Church, the blessings of the priesthood are available to all—men, women, and children. We all benefit from the influence of righteous priesthood leadership, and we all have the privilege of receiving the saving ordinances of the priesthood.

Priesthood and the Family

The most important exercise of the priesthood takes place in 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, scripture study, and family home evening. He works with his wife to teach the children and help them prepare to receive the ordinances of salvation (see D&C 68:25–28). He gives priesthood blessings for direction, healing, and comfort.

Many members do not have faithful Melchizedek Priesthood holders in their homes. However, through the service of home teachers and priesthood leaders, all members of the Church can enjoy the blessings of priesthood power in their lives.

Priesthood Quorums

A priesthood quorum is an organized group of brethren who hold the same priesthood office. The primary purposes of quorums are to serve others, build unity and brotherhood, and instruct one another in doctrines, principles, and duties.

Quorums exist at all levels of Church organization. The President of the Church and his counselors form the Quorum of the First Presidency. The Twelve Apostles also form a quorum. Seventies, both General Authorities and Area Authorities, are organized into quorums. Each stake president presides over a quorum of high priests, made up of all the high priests in the stake. Each ward or branch normally has quorums of elders, priests, teachers, and deacons. High priests are also organized in wards, serving in high priests groups.

Home Teaching

From the time priesthood holders are ordained to the office of teacher, they have the opportunity and responsibility

to serve as home teachers. In this way they work toward fulfilling their duty to “watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them” (D&C 20:53).

Home teachers have a sacred duty to be the Church’s first source of help to individuals and families. They visit their assigned members at least monthly. In serving and visiting their assigned members, they support parents in their responsibilities, teach the gospel to each family member, nurture friendships, and help members prepare to receive temple ordinances and live worthy of the blessings of the gospel.

Leaders in wards and branches ensure that home teachers are assigned to each family or individual. They follow up with home teachers to help meet each member’s spiritual and temporal needs.

Priesthood Keys

The exercise of priesthood authority in the Church is governed by those who hold priesthood keys (see D&C 65:2; 124:123). Those who hold priesthood keys have the right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction. For example, a bishop holds priesthood keys that enable him to preside in his ward. Therefore, when a child in that ward is prepared to be baptized, the person baptizing the child must receive authorization from the bishop.

Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood. He has given His Apostles the keys that are necessary for governing His Church. Only the senior Apostle, the President of the Church, may use (or authorize another person to use) these keys for governing the entire Church (see D&C 43:1–4; 81:2; 132:7).

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. A person who serves in one of these positions holds the keys only until he is released.

Counselors do not receive keys, but they do receive authority and responsibility by calling and assignment.

Exercising the Priesthood Righteously

If you are a priesthood holder, remember that the priesthood should be a part of you at all times and in all circumstances. It is not like a cloak that you can put on and take off at will. Any ordination to a priesthood office is a call to life-long service, with the promise that the Lord will qualify you to do His work according to your faithfulness.

You must be worthy in order to receive and exercise priesthood power. The words you speak and your everyday behavior affect your ability to serve. Your behavior in public must be above reproach. Your behavior in private is even more important. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord declared that “the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness” (D&C 121:36). He warned priesthood holders:

“When we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, 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. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself” (D&C 121:37–38).

You cannot maintain any power or influence in the priesthood except “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile.” If you are “moved upon by the Holy Ghost” to reprove someone, show forth afterward “an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may

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know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death" (D&C 121:41–43).

As you exercise the priesthood in righteousness and love, you will find joy in serving as an instrument in the Lord's hands. He said:

"Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

"The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever" (D&C 121:45–46).

Additional references: John 15:16; Acts 8:14–20; James 5:14–15; D&C 13; 20; 84; 107; Joseph Smith—History 1:68–73

See also Aaronic Priesthood; Church Administration; Melchizedek Priesthood; Ordinances; Restoration of the Gospel

Profanity

Profanity is disrespect or contempt for sacred things. It includes casual or irreverent use of the name of any member of the Godhead. It also includes any type of unclean or vulgar speech or behavior.

Always use the names of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost with reverence and respect. Misusing their names is a sin. Profane, vulgar, or crude language or gestures, as well as immoral jokes, are offensive to the Lord and to others.

Foul language harms your spirit and degrades you. Do not let others influence you to use foul language. Instead, use clean language that uplifts and edifies others. Choose friends who use good language. Set an example that will encourage those around you to use clean language. If friends and