

## *Mission Leadership*

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Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

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You have received valuable and helpful instructions in this seminar. I think your purpose now will be to organize, prioritize, and implement what you have learned. This will take a little time and a lot of patience.

As I have thought of what I might be able to share with you this morning, I have focused my thinking on your leadership that you are going to have to develop to be successful as a full-time mission president. I will try to explain what I would do differently if I were in your seats ready to go out and preside over a mission again.

Barbara and I served in the Canada Toronto Mission in 1974 to 1977. Now that's 40 years ago, and I have visited hundreds of missions throughout the world and have more fully learned some of the *significant principles* that are essential to strengthen and to lift a mission.

If I were going out with you, I would do three things. First, I would focus earlier in listening and counseling with my missionary leaders, much along the line of what we have been beautifully taught by Elder Bednar. Second, I would focus more effectively on building a strong mission leadership team. And finally, I would emphasize the simple and clear message of the doctrine of Christ and help my missionaries keep their eyes focused on this

doctrine and focused on the living prophets and apostles.

So let me talk first about counseling in our councils. I will spend most of my time this morning on this important topic. I have learned that mission leaders respond and lead better when they have the opportunity to discover and solve problems in counsel with their mission president and his wife.

Moses learned a very important lesson, which is applicable to all of you and to all of us today, when his father-in-law Jethro in the book of Exodus taught him the following:

“And when Moses’ father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. And Moses’ father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. . . .

“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.”<sup>1</sup>

An example comes to mind that illustrates what can happen when we follow Jethro’s counsel. This is an account that comes from my own experience in the Canada Toronto Mission.

One of my zone leaders called at 6:00 a.m. in the morning and told me they had been kneeling down saying their prayers the night before when they felt that something was wrong with the missionaries in a small branch. They decided to get dressed and drive to the missionary apartment to see what was wrong.

I asked them what they discovered. He said they found some pornography in the apartment. I then asked, “What did you do?” He responded, “President, we burned it!” He continued, “We stayed up the rest of the night talking with the elders and told them that our zone was better than that! We called them to repentance.” And then he concluded, “President, don’t worry; we fixed it!”

With the announcement at this seminar of the role of missionaries following up with their converts and those they activate, you will need

to counsel with your missionary leaders and teach them to lead. Resist micromanaging your mission, and let your missionaries become the leaders that they are capable of being.

In other words, *empower* them—let them lead and let them take ownership or stewardship in their assigned areas. If you empower your missionary leaders, you will bless them. If you do not empower them, you will be overwhelmed, as you simply cannot be everywhere at once in the mission. In those respects, you should liken yourself to Moses:

“Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and [the missionaries] that [are] with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Some of the most important gatherings you will hold at the beginning of your mission are the mission leadership council and the zone conferences.

How you conduct the first leadership council and the first zone conferences will set the tone for the first six months when your mission naturally transitions from the former mission president to your leadership.

Here are a few suggestions for your mission leadership council that I believe will help you in your mission:

Don’t preach. Instead, implement the council system. From the very beginning, God has done His work through the system of organized councils. The first council of which we are aware occurred before the world on which we live was created. We don’t know exactly how this Council in Heaven was conducted or the procedures that were followed, but based on what we do know,

Heavenly Father's administration of the Grand Council illustrates several key principles in decision making through councils.

Provide a "vision." In Proverbs, we learn, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."<sup>3</sup> An effective mission president has a vision. And it doesn't have to include every detail in the beginning of what you want to do.

Encourage free expression. Have your mission leaders discuss and suggest how to accomplish the vision you present according to the scriptures, prophetic teachings of the modern prophets and apostles, *Preach My Gospel*, and the current guidelines and directions from the Missionary Department. I would suggest that you use perhaps a white board or a blackboard and list the suggestions from the council members on how to raise the expectations in the mission for finding, teaching, baptizing, and activating less-active members. Come to an agreement with your leadership and then move united by the impact and contribution from your leaders. They then *own* the effort, and together they will move the work ahead. I suggest you settle on one or two—maybe three—needs per council meeting, and then follow up to see how they are progressing.

Empower the sister training leaders by listening to them and encouraging their participation. Please unlock one of the most important resources you will have in the mission—your sister training leaders.

Let me caution you, however, that you encourage sister training leaders to provide their insights about *every aspect of the work*, not just about the work among the sister missionaries that they work with.

You cannot hope to lift your mission and bring hearts and souls to Christ without using every resource the Lord has given to help you take advantage of your opportunities to address any of the obstacles that may be standing in the way of the mission.

Now, practice until the council system is deeply rooted in your mission culture. Develop a team spirit that will jointly bring about success.

I've used the phrase "mission culture," and I'll use it several more times. You'll hear it throughout your mission. Let me provide you one possible definition of the term. "Mission culture" is an expression that defines what happens when you are not present. May I repeat that? "Mission culture" is an expression that defines what happens when you are not present.

The same principles outlined above from your first mission leadership council can then be applied to your first series of zone conferences.

Certainly, some of your missionaries will have had experience in the Aaronic Priesthood and the Young Women's presidencies. However, do not expect that your missionary leaders will have learned very much about how the Church should work and how councils really ought to operate.

Please organize your mission based on the principles of leadership in the Church, as outlined in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, chapter 3.1 through 3.4. If you are not familiar with this material or if you have not read it recently, I would suggest that you do so without delay before your first mission leadership council and your first zone councils. Thereafter, review it often

throughout your mission, and teach your missionaries the principles contained therein.

Additionally, carefully read, understand, and apply what you learn about missionary organization and leadership in the material you have received from the Missionary Department and, of course, from *Preach My Gospel* and what you have learned during this week's training.

One mission experience illustrates the impact of empowering your leaders during leadership councils.

In this illustrative case, when the new mission president arrived in his mission, he discovered his mission was assigned sixty thousand miles each month for the mission vehicle fleet. However, the mission was using nearly ninety thousand miles each month. As you can imagine, the mission got further in the red each month.

During a mission leadership council, the new mission president gave the leaders a vision: If the mission would meet the mileage goal established by the Missionary Department, the Lord would bless the mission and increase the power to find, teach, and baptize.

He then turned the item over to the council for them to come up with a plan to meet the mileage goal and to increase the effectiveness of finding, teaching, and baptizing.

Soon, the council decided that the assistants should work with the zone leader companionships to determine how many miles each zone needed to fulfill its missionary purpose to “invite others to come unto Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Once the zone leader companionships adopted mileage goals for their zone, they left the council and met with each district leader to establish district goals.

The district leaders then met with their missionaries to determine the mileage goal for each proselyting area, based on the council system.

None of you will be surprised to learn that within the first month, the mission met the assigned mileage goal with miles to spare; and, more importantly, the sense of urgency to find, teach, and baptize increased among the missionaries as they walked more, rode their bikes and buses more, and talked to more people instead of spending so much time in their cars driving back and forth across their proselyting areas.

Please note that the mission president presented the vision, the mission leadership decided how to make the vision a reality through the council system, and the mission itself followed through accordingly. Because the mission leaders set the mileage goals, they were determined to meet those goals because they were their goals.

Although the mission president has to know where he is going, he has to be patient. Please remember that it takes time to build synergy and consensus among your mission leadership and your missionaries. The issues you will face will be solved much faster when your leaders know how to lead.

Because missions are dynamic and missionaries come and go every six weeks, you will need to be patient—teaching and practicing the council system over and over again throughout your mission experience and

right down to the very last month of your mission.

Now let me share a few suggestions that are important for your missionaries to understand.

The first one is emphasize that to train a new missionary is the most important leadership assignment in the mission. Point out that among the leadership assignments in the mission, training is one that requires the most trust from you and the blessings of the Lord.

Remember what President Eyring and President Uchtdorf said about the power of good trainers. Elder Keith Tibbitts from Idaho Falls, Idaho, my trainer sixty-six years ago in England, will always be one of my heroes.

Of course, you have to prove to the missionaries that you believe training a new missionary is the most important leadership assignment by assigning some of your best missionaries as trainers. Arrange transfers so that many of your excellent leaders can serve as trainers at the end of their missions. It will send a strong signal about the importance of training new missionaries.

The second thought is identify missionaries who desire to find, teach, and baptize. I cannot overemphasize this point that your leaders must be young men and young women who *desire* to find, teach, and baptize. Finding is the key to missionary work. Remember what *Preach My Gospel* states: “Nothing happens in missionary work until you find someone to teach.”

The successful and happy elders and sisters that I see around the world are the missionaries who conduct effective finding

activities every single day. Elder Franklin D. Richards, who was then an assistant to the Twelve, came to our mission and taught my missionaries to talk to at least ten people every day. He said, “If you want to teach more people, talk to more people.” Doing this every day helped to significantly increase our convert baptisms.

Third, identify missionaries who desire to observe missionary standards and guidelines and who openly show they are loyal to the Lord and to you and to their leaders.

This means you need to foster an environment in which your leaders are admired, not envied. Your leaders must be obedient, faithful, hard workers. Nothing undermines a mission more than for leaders to preach obedience and hard work but then fail to be an example of it themselves.

Fourth, identify missionaries who motivate their companions by using gospel principles. An effective leader serves others with love. Mission leaders who are friendly, effective, and hard working are able to inspire, train, counsel, and lift the other missionaries to succeed.

Your mission leaders need to study and practice Christlike attributes. In chapter 6 of *Preach My Gospel*, they learn to *become* the leaders that the Lord and you need them to become.

Be wise and eliminate any perception that there is a predictable ladder to become a leader in your mission. Young missionaries that you see can lead, call them to be zone leaders and assistants by their skill, not by their time of service. Keep assistants in the field and not in the office or near the mission

home. They are the seasoned trainers of your zone leaders and others as assigned by you.

Now let's turn our attention to keeping focused on the message, which is the doctrine and gospel of Christ, and to teaching your missionaries to keep their eyes on chapter 3 in *Preach My Gospel*.

Last Friday, a daughter of a missionary who served under my grandfather, Melvin J. Ballard, in 1916 in the Northwestern States Mission, came to my office and gave me a poem that was written by my grandfather in his own hand, which he had given to his missionaries. I would like to note before I read just a little of that poem that President Ballard served for ten years. That can make your three years look pretty easy.

The poem is rather long, so I won't read it in its entirety. However, what I noticed when I first read it myself was that it presented a clear, simple message for his missionaries to share with the people:

*The first time I went tracting my heart was filled with dread,  
And when my knock was answered I would rather have been dead.*

*However when the start was made and my senses were collected,  
I discovered that it wasn't half as bad as I expected.*

*Some places I was turned down cold, and at others was well treated,  
But in the cause of spreading truth I would not be defeated. . . .*

*So I go on unto the next, who greets me with a smile,  
as I explain to him our truths in an interesting style.*

*But as I stand there talking and shivering with the weather, he says  
"Won't you come in a while and we'll discuss these things together?"*

*And then I try to tell him in the best way that I can,  
how Christ himself came down to earth and gave us the only plan.*

*That if we expect to get back into the presence of our Lord,  
we will surely have to render obedience to his word.*

*No matter how sincere we are, in the doctrines we believe,  
that doesn't make them right you see and full of power to save;*

*But we all will have to come to the plan that Christ laid down  
if we expect to get rewarded, and wear a righteous crown.*

*The way is plain and simple so we need not ere therein,  
and by walking in it strictly, we will Salvation win.*

*The first principle to follow is known to us as faith,  
and through the exercise of it, we can even conquer death. . . .*

*Repentance follows after faith and takes its rightful place,  
for in the exercise of it is shown the Savior's grace. . . .*

*Baptism is the next thing then included in this plan  
and all can see its necessity, if they the scriptures scan.  
. . . .*

*In the government of nations men must be authorized,  
to represent their government, if their acts be recognized.*

*How can we think that God who is more wise than  
all of us,  
would own the acts of men whom he had not  
empowered thus?*

*Following these principles enumerated above,  
and as a natural consequence, which also shows his  
love,*

*God has promised through the laying on of hands that  
he would give  
the Holy Ghost to comfort us and help us to better  
live.*

*Now the mission of the Holy Ghost is to be a lamp  
unto our feet,  
to guide us in the path of right and give us spiritual  
meat.*

*He brings to our remembrance the things learned in  
the past,  
and even shows us things to come and aid us to the  
last.*

*His further duty is to testify of the Father and the  
Son,  
and give us testimonies that in no other way are won,*

*and with His help to strengthen us, we can cope with  
any foe,  
and finally be victorious in this struggle here below.*

That's part of the poem—all the first principles of the doctrine and gospel of Christ. Please note the clear and simple message President Ballard wanted his missionaries to know, understand, apply, and teach. The clear and simple gospel truths taught by the Spirit, and as beautifully taught again this morning by Elder Bednar, will yield many fine converts.

Now I would like to switch to a word of caution. When you leave here, you will step

back into the world that is very “noisy.” This is a “noisy world.” The noise seems to get louder and louder every day, and if we are not careful, the noise can distract you and your missionaries from fulfilling your missionary purpose.

During your mission, you and your missionaries will undoubtedly be exposed to negative news stories about the Church that seem to interest local, national, and even international media. This has been the case since 1830 and is to be expected as the Church continues to come “forth out of obscurity and out of darkness.”<sup>5</sup>

The Lord told Joseph Smith that his “name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people.”<sup>6</sup>

So don't be surprised by uncomplimentary, distracting news about the Church.

Jesus told His disciples to be prepared for such when He said: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. . . . Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”<sup>7</sup>

I have been around a long time, and I have seen numerous instances in which the Church has been in the news.

Forty years ago when Barbara and I served together in Toronto, the Church made steady progress, but even then we found that many people were opposed to our message and our missionaries.

For the past 38 years I have traveled around the world witnessing the expansion of this great work and also the challenges and obstacles that face us in sharing the message of the Restoration.

In all those years, I have learned that *today's sensational headlines eventually become tomorrow's historical footnotes*. Always remember the gospel or the “good news” that we proclaim will continue to be the most important news the world and your missionaries will be able to teach in clear and simple terms.

Presidents and wives, will you please focus on the doctrine of Christ? Help your missionaries to understand it, live it, love it, and teach it.

In a similar vein, keep the eyes of the mission on the leaders of the Church. I testify to you that we will not and we cannot lead this Church astray.

And as you teach your missionaries to focus their eyes on us, teach them to never follow those who think they know more about how to administer the affairs of the Church than our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ do.

I have discovered in my ministry that those who have become lost or confused are typically those who have most often stopped studying, living, and loving the doctrine of Christ. They have stopped praying, worshiping, partaking of the sacrament, and studying the scriptures and words of the former and living prophets and apostles. They have forgotten that when the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve speak with a united voice, it is the voice of the Lord for that time. The Lord reminds us, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.”<sup>8</sup>

You will prepare the future leaders of the Church. In the process of that, keep that long-range goal in your minds.

I received just two days ago, a letter dated 1916. I just gave you a poem from my grandfather, who was a mission president in 1916 in the Northwestern States, and now I’m going to give you a copy of a letter written by Hyrum M. Smith, my other grandfather, that he wrote to one of his zone leaders. This is 98 years ago:

“Kindly send me a separate confidential letter respecting the character and labor of Elder \_\_\_\_\_ while in the missionary field. Said letter should cover the following points, together with whatever you may deem it wisdom to add. As to whether he has energetic activity, prompt and faithful in the discharge of the day of his duties, or in any way careless and indifferent. Give some information regarding his ability as a speaker and if opportunity has been given him as a presiding officer. Say something as to the general bearing whether he is discrete and wise or boyish and thoughtless in his manner. State whether he is a man who readily accepts counsel or is inclined to be stubborn and self-willed. Indicate if he has been studious and acquired a good knowledge of the gospel or if he has failed to make the most of his time. With kind regards and ever wishing you success in your important, responsible calling, I remain your brother, Hyrum M. Smith.”

When I saw the poem from 1916 and this letter two days ago, I thought to myself, “If we could look in on the mission president seminar 50 years from now, they will be saying the same thing. It has been eternal ever since the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored in 1830.



May God bless you, my beloved friends. Mission presidents and your dear wives, carry on this great and glorious work. Enjoy it. Rally around you and lift and teach young men and young women to lead, and it will be a joyous experience. And you will have time to have the experiences that were so beautifully discussed in our first session this

morning. I bear my witness and testimony to you that this is the work of the Lord. I know that. And I know these missionaries are the greatest young people in the whole earth. And you are blessed to be their leader for these next three years, to which I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 18:14–18, 21–26.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 18:18.

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 29:18.

<sup>4</sup> *Preach My Gospel*, 1

<sup>5</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith—History 1:33.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:10–12.

<sup>8</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 1:38.