

# HOME MINISTRY: BUILDING UP THE KINGDOM OF GOD ONE HOME AT A TIME

Thoughts and resources compiled for the Brethren who visit and minister in the homes of the Saints

Compiled by Elder Jay Havener  
Oakwood Restoration Branch of JESUS CHRIST

From the time I was ordained a Priest, the value of home ministry was drummed into my head. It was made known to me over and over that the Priest was *the* family minister to the saints. The Priest was the frontline in teaching the saints their duties and responsibilities. It was the Priest who took the lead in preparing children for baptism, by making certain that mom and dad were teaching their children the things they would need to know before being baptized. It was the Priest that taught the value of prayer in the home, the value of establishing the family alters, and the tenets of the stewardship principles every Latter Day Saint should know.

Of course as a Priest I had to also know where my ministry began and ended. I needed to learn to be sensitive to the tender hearts of the Saints and recognize when someone had been hurt so that I could invite a Teacher to visit the home with me, or when there was a financial or physical need and invite the Deacon to visit with me. I became well-versed in the ministry of the Aaronic Priesthood and come to understand it was the cornerstone in building Saintly homes which led to more spiritual Sunday services and Wednesday night prayer and testimony services. I learned when it was necessary to call for the Elders to visit in the homes because of the spiritual needs within the home that could not be met by the ministry of the Aaronic Priesthood, namely that of administration to the sick, or where the keys of the Kingdom needed to be better understood.

It has been a concern of mine that not only have I become lax in my ministry in the homes (now, as an Elder in the Church), but priesthood in general, since the divisions within the Church, have become lax and our brothers and sisters have suffered both physically and spiritually. I have heard many times members say, "What ever happened to so-and-so?" Or I have heard priesthood say, "Why has the sanctuary been so empty lately? Where has everybody gone? Things were going along so well, now our numbers are down."

I am convinced that the problem is not in our sanctuaries. The problem is that we have stopped teaching in the homes. We wonder where our young people are, but we have not attended to their learning opportunities in the home. We have placed the burden of the acclimation of our young people into the church on the scant forty-five minute Sunday School hour. Likewise, we have relegated our adult member's study to the same forty-five minutes. We are not sharing the gospel story in the homes and encouraging our brothers and sisters to share prayer and testimonies with their children, or spend time with them reading and studying the scriptures. We wonder why there are not more prayers and testimonies offered in the sanctuary on Wednesday night or why more saints aren't in the pews midweek. Without instruction in the home, study in the home, and prayer in the home, the Saints are not having the spiritual experiences they once had. For the want of prayer the testimony is lost, for the want of testimony the Spirit is lost, and for the lack of the Spirit the church begins to die.

In my reading and study, I have encountered several resources related to home ministry that I would like to share with my brothers in the priesthood in the hopes that we will start this week and become better home ministers and recognize that although it is not as visible as speaking powerful words from the pulpit, it is more important that we teach in the homes so that the saints are prepared to come to the sanctuary and to offer the reasonable service which is required of them.

### **When You Feel Like Shrinking From Your Duty as a Home Minister....**

The following is a historical statement from Church history, which captures the courage and devotion of a priesthood member fulfilling his office and calling to visit the homes of the saints. William Cahoon joined the church October 16, 1830. In part here is his testimony.<sup>1</sup>

"...I was called and ordained to act as a Teacher to visit the families of the Saints. I got along very well 'till I found that I was obliged to pay a visit to the Prophet. Being young, only about 17 years of age, I felt my weakness in visiting the Prophet and his family in the capacity of a Teacher. I almost felt like shrinking from duty. Finally, I went to the door and knocked, and in a minute the Prophet came to the door. I stood there trembling and said to him, "Brother Joseph, I have come to visit you in the capacity of a Teacher, if it is convenient for you." He said, "Brother William, I am glad to see you, sit down in that chair, and I will go call my family in."

They soon came in and took seats. He then said, "Brother William, I submit myself and family into your hands," and took his seat. "Now, Brother William," he said, "ask all the questions you feel like."

By this time my fears and trembling had ceased, and I said, "Brother Joseph, are you trying to live your religion?"

He answered, "Yes."

Then I said, "Do you pray in your family?"

He said, "Yes."

"Do you teach your family the principles of the gospel?"

He replied, "Yes, I am trying to do it."

"Do you ask a blessing on your food?"

He answered, "Yes."

"Are you trying to live in peace and harmony with all your family?"

He said that he was.

I turned to Sister Emma, his wife, and said, "Sister Emma, are you trying to live your religion? Do you teach your children to obey their parents? Do you teach them to pray?"

To all these questions, she answered, "Yes, I am trying to do so."

I then turned to Joseph and said, "I am now through with my questions as a Teacher; and now if you have any instructions to give, I shall be happy to receive them."

He said, "God bless you, Brother William; and if you are humble and faithful, you shall have power to settle all difficulties that may come before you in the capacity of a Teacher."

I then left my parting blessing upon him and his family, as a Teacher, and took my departure.

### **Excerpts from a Letter to Home Ministering Priesthood, Recapping our Commitments to Visit ALL the Saints...**

The impetus for this letter apparently was the results of a priesthood meeting in which the subject of home ministry was the topic. I am not sure who sent the letter; I assume it was the Pastor, or perhaps the Home Ministry Director. There was no name attached to the excerpts. My source is from the Gospel Essentials of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints website found at <http://www.computercontrolsystems.com/GE/index.htm>.

Notice as you read the following information from this letter to the priesthood; there is commitment to an action plan. The plan is not universal and obviously has been developed with the needs of a particular congregation and priesthood in mind. But the lessons should be obvious to us; home ministry is not something that should be a haphazard effort.

"...Making a commitment, however, is not all we discussed on Sunday: we took a close look at ourselves, where we have "met the mark" as home ministers, and where we have not. Life teaches us that:

*'Those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it.'*

Consequently, we had an honest discussion (at our meeting) over why most attempts at home ministry have fizzled in recent years.... the answer very likely lies within ourselves as minister and members. Several honest answers were offered, and a common theme surfaced:

***The Priesthood has usually felt a lack of continuing purpose or focus when visiting member's homes (i.e. "Why am I really here?"), and equally important, families receiving ministry have also wondered what the real purpose is (i.e. "Why are THEY really here?")***

It is my belief that home ministry does not just augment the ministry of the restoration movement, but rather was a priesthood function restored, as were all the other functions of the priesthood, since the church of the firstborn.

### **The "Program"**

To some, the idea of a "program" to coordinate home ministry first connotes images of a dry, spirit-lacking, dead-end effort of man to put structure to what should be a free flowing manifestation of the spirit. I wouldn't challenge any brother in this regard, but would simply ask all to consider this: Do we have the fruit to bear today that our response to God's Holy Spirit has produced consistent ministry in the homes according to the commandments given?

Of course the workings of the Holy Spirit has to be first and foremost part of our purpose, and I believe it will be, if we are found anxiously engaged in a good cause. But how can we 'shepherd the flock' if we don't purposefully count the sheep? Our ultimate desire is to minister, but sometimes we need to "administer" in order that the Saints receive the ministry they deserve. As I see it, the structure of the home ministry "program" can be summed up in three words: **to encourage discipline.**

Simply put, the most important element to home ministry is being there—being in the homes. And that is the main purpose, to get ministers to the Saints' homes in a consistent manner. If we are willing to move our feet, I believe the Lord will direct our path.

When we shared testimonies on Sunday relating why we "failed" to maintain consistent home ministry in the past, no one ever shared any evidence that a force or policy external to the congregation required us to discontinue home visiting. Furthermore, no one could recall that families receiving ministry ever responded negatively, or indicated they were not pleased with having the priesthood in their homes. The conclusion revealed that a lack of purpose, without a commonly understood goal among the men visiting, caused an eventual lack of enthusiasm, lack of focus, and ultimately lack of visiting priesthood.

## Communion Comparisons

In considering the need and purpose for home ministry, I have found it appropriate to compare it to the Saints' need for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Consider several parallels:

- Communion is to be a regular part of our spiritual "dietary requirement," not a haphazard occurrence; **the Saints needs home visiting on a regular basis, too.**
- Communion is administered to the body of assembled Saints according to an orderly plan to make sure everyone is served; **an order is needed to insure Saints are visited in the homes, too.**
- No one priesthood member is asked to shoulder an undue burden in administering the sacrament, the workload is divided appropriately to be handled easily and efficiently; **if we take on reasonable responsibilities, no one individual will feel over-burdened.**
- All baptized members are to receive of the communion according to the plan; with home visiting, it is great to visit members as special needs and inspiration directs, but **all need this ministry and it's important we make sure all get counted.**
- No priesthood member is asked to serve himself the sacrament, but another comes and serves the sacrament for the first; likewise, **each household, whether or not priesthood live within, need the services of another to come in, advocating their cause to our Heavenly Father.**
- The sacrament service emphasizes "service" to those receiving, rather than enamoring those ministering; in the same manner, **we would do well if we wore emotional "blindness" when serving fellow families, not feeling like "what's in it for me," but recognizing home ministry as simply a sacrifice of love.**

## Home Ministry Goals

An outline of our home ministry commitments:

- Become the advocates of these families to our Heavenly Father. They will become your charges.
- Each team will be assigned approximately 6-7 families to visit.

- Visit your families every three months. Expect to dedicate about 12 hours of service in home ministering each quarter to accomplish this reasonable goal.
- Schedule! Make your appointments with your families early on rather than putting them off. The Aaronic Priesthood team member should be designated to make the contacts with families as much as possible. Also, visiting is possible any day of the week—we are not confined to one night a week.
- Prepare for each home visit with prayer and devotion.
- Pray to have the courage and discernment to share the Gospel and teach as appropriate.
- Learn names and interests of all the children and family members. Seek them out at times of congregational fellowship. Show a genuine interest in their lives and let them know you care (one idea could be to keep a list of the family members and call them on their birthdays), in addition to just seeing them in their home.
- We are striving for 100% of the homes to be visited every three months. We can easily do it if we all pitch in.
- We will provide an accounting of our efforts to the pastor regularly, for the edification of the pastor's ministry and the congregation's benefit.
- As a group of home ministers, we will try to meet as a group once each three months. We will discuss how we're doing and receive instruction from the pastorate on principles and messages we should encourage in the homes.

Lastly, my thoughts are reminded of an inspirational phrase reading: *Remember, we shouldn't be surprised that a small group of dedicated people should be called to change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

May we as God's priesthood do our part to help change the world for Christ."

## A Few Points to Ponder About Home Ministry<sup>2</sup>

Nephi in the Book of Mormon was commended for his “unwearyingness” in declaring the word that he had been given to teach the people.

**“...Blessed are thou, Nephi, for those things which thou hast done; for I have beheld how thou hast with unwearyingness declared the word which I have given unto thee, unto this people. And thou hast not feared them, and hast not sought thine own life, but have sought my will, and to keep my commandments. And now because thou hast done this with such unwearyingness, behold, I will bless thee for ever; and I will make thee mighty in word and deed, in faith and in works; yea, even that all things shall be done unto thee according to thy word...”**

**Helaman 3:115-117**

When we stand before our Heavenly Father someday, will we have the same commendation for us? We might well have if we are dedicated to our calling as priesthood to go into the homes and teach without looking inward at ourselves. Let the following be guiding principles in our efforts to minister in the homes of the Saints:

- **Resolve in your mind that personal sacrifice is necessary and expected by the Lord in carrying out his work.** Notice that Nephi was also commended because he had not “sought his own life.” If you are feeling a “strain” or challenge to see families you have charge over, this probably means you are on the right track.
- **Make the conscious choice to make a difference in the lives of a few families.** Do not be lulled into believing that there is “nothing to do” until the Lord sets all things in order. Consider that effective ministering in the homes may perhaps be one of the essential means that the Lord can use to do just that: set all things in order.
- **Remember that there is not a single man called to the Lord’s work who does not have competing challenges for his time** (i.e. job, family, bills to pay, personal interests). We who endeavor to take this responsibility, all making this commitment together, not only to the families being visited, but also to each of us providing home ministry. This adds strength. At the same time, we must trust that each other is endeavoring to carry out his responsibilities with all diligence, or the morale of the group may falter.



- **Make each visit with a specific message and purpose.** When going into a home, if the family asked, would you be able to state in a single sentence your purpose in coming to that home?
- **As ministers for God, we can't be afraid to teach.** Alma commanded nothing taught varying from the words that he spoke.

**“And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And he commanded them that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets.”**

**Mosiah 9:51, 52**

Do you think home ministry is important? Ask the Utah Mormons how important they think it is. They attribute home teaching as their number one reason for their success as a church.

### **Ten Governing Rules for Home Ministers<sup>3</sup>**

1. **Make your visits prayerfully.** You are on the Lord's errand. Pray for His help and discernment. Always pray in the home if agreeable to the family. Remember that you (the Aaronic Priesthood) have the keys to the ministry of Angels—use it in blessing the families.
2. **Prepare for each visit:** have a goal and keep a plan.
3. **Be kind and encouraging during your visit.** Praise whenever possible.
4. **Show sincere interest in the family you visit.** Rejoice, weep, mourn, console, enjoy. Concentrate on them, on their needs.
5. **Be constantly cheerful and uplifting.** Do not drag in your own burdens. Do not dwell on your aches and pains; do not exploit the triumphs and tragedies of your life, great though they might be.
6. **Remember you represent the Savior.** It's His gospel you are teaching. Do and say what you feel He would have you do and say.
7. **“Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly.”** Never speak ill of others, or criticize the church.

8. **Search out and tenderly consider the family's feelings.** You are in their home to identify their needs, to teach and prepare them in righteousness.
9. **Radiate genuine humility.** The Savior never boasted or bragged. For all He achieved—and He created everything that was created—He was humble. He gave all credit to the Father.
10. **Bear a strong testimony during each visit.** Testify of Christ's example, His gospel, His commandments, His scriptures, His church, His Kingdom.

### **Seven Things Home Ministers Should Never Do<sup>4</sup>**

1. Never just “drop in” unannounced.
2. Never use the family as a captive audience for your ego, or your next sermon.
3. Never talk of things that interest only you.
4. Never ask embarrassing questions, or put someone on the spot.
5. Never dominate the discussion.
6. Never stay too long.
7. Never encourage negative remarks.

### **Eight Keys in Effective Communicating<sup>5</sup>**

1. **Ask questions.** You usually do not know the family's needs unless you ask appropriate questions and listen carefully to their answers.
2. **Concentrate on what they say.** Too many times we merely pretend to listen, waiting for that moment when we can jump back in and take control of the conversation. Listen intently. Soak up what they are saying.
3. **Repeat back what they have just said.** When it is appropriate for you to respond, do so by repeating the essence of what they have just told you. For example, you might say, “Then you believe that...” and so on. This lets them know you have heard what they said. It gives them a chance to continue talking. They know you are listening.

4. **Do not change the subject.** Stay with what they are telling you. When they are quite finished, help them to continue talking by asking another related question.
5. **Invite them to tell you more.** If what they are saying is productive to you, encourage them to continue: "Tell me more, ...What else did you feel?"
6. **Do not interrupt.** When you force yourself into their monologue, it obviously breaks into their line of thought. Depending on how forceful or oblique your interruption is they may never return to the genuine feelings they were trying to communicate to you.
7. **Do not let them see you are not interested.** If they lose eye contact with you because you are gazing about, looking through your scriptures, moving or shifting your position, they will quickly recognize you are not listening to them and not interested in what they are saying. Their words may, in fact, be uninteresting—but even so, your concentration and sensitivity about what they are saying will help you learn more of them and thus become a more helpful home minister.
8. **Avoid criticism.** How can you be a helpful sounding board if you are too quick to criticize or too vocal in your evaluation? Take a soft approach. Compliment the family where you can. If they see you as being reasonable and responsive, they will seek your council and advice again and again. Avoiding criticisms builds a trusting relationship.

## **The Purpose and Importance of Home Ministry<sup>6</sup>**

The Church is designed of the Lord to minister in every way to perfect the lives of His people. He placed priesthood in the church for just that reason; "for the edifying of the body of Christ." We reject our divine calling to the priesthood if we fail to provide specialized ministry either publicly in the church or at a more personal level in the home.

Priesthood is expected to provide a ministry to the Saints that will encompass the whole range of their spiritual growth—family relations, personal relations, and social relations. Home ministry can stimulate the family to grow spiritually; impress the membership with the purposes of God, of Christ, and of his church; help the members to see how much the church needs them and encourage consistent attendance; guide members in giving their help and money where the need is most apparent and where the law requires it; promote a missionary awareness and stimulate the evangelistic outreach of the family.

## **The function of Home Ministry**

- Ministry in the home is educational, corrective, and inspirational.
  - The church is strengthened as the functions, ordinances, and the teachings of the church become relative to each member.
  - It invokes a spiritual peace and abundant life in the experience of each member.
  
- Ministry in the home often deals with the emotions, habits, and relationships of individuals.
  - Home ministry may become involved with some very delicate and intimate matters.
  - It reassures, invites, encourages, and inspires all members in their moments of joy, crisis, comfort, and concern.
  
- Ministry in the home seeks to transmit faith, trust, and knowledge.
  - It makes available advice, direction, and spiritual guidance to members.
  - It helps the family to build a Zion home life.

## **Who Performs Home Ministry?**

The very fact that there are many offices of priesthood presupposes varying responsibilities, for if all had the same duties there would be but one office. While every elder, priest, teacher, and deacon is to perform a general ministry to “teach, expound, exhort,” there is provided in the structure of our priesthood a ministry of specialists. “Every elder, priest, teacher, or deacon is to be ordained *according to the gifts and callings of God unto him.*”<sup>7</sup> The significance of priesthood office is in the specialized duties. A man will “magnify his calling” when he develops his special calling and gifts while honoring the general priesthood work.

Pulpit ministry, administering the ordinances, and administrative leadership is primarily ministries of the Melchisedec priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood’s primary responsibility is related to families and individuals. Home ministry is the significant ministry of the Aaronic order.

## **Elder’s Role in Home Ministry**

The elder is to nurture the church and to “watch over the church.”<sup>8</sup> In that capacity the elder:

- Guards the flock against all influences that would destroy it
- Protects the church against false teachings and doctrines

In this capacity, he will need to visit in the homes of the Saints. He will learn of their spiritual problems that he may minister to their needs. Some elders should become qualified counselors, particularly in spiritual matters. As shepherds watching over the church, the elders will also do general visiting in the homes.

### **Priest's Role in Home Ministry**

The priest is specifically designated as a "family minister." He should become acquainted with the needs and strengths of the family requiring his ministry. In that capacity the priest:

- Inspires the family to worship and study together
- Encourage families to establish a family altar and designated times for prayer and study together

A priest's visits may be requested by the presiding elder, by the family, or made upon his own initiative. However, a visit is established, the priest should be prepared to teach the gospel principles, prayer, and encourage scriptural study to the family in a manner that is understood by all ages within the home.

### **Teacher's Role in Home Ministry**

The teacher has been instructed "to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them...and see that the church meet together often, and also see that all members do their duty."<sup>9</sup> This ministry requires him to visit in the homes. The teacher is a friend to the people. He must inspire them to have confidence in him and respect for his ministry, so that they will share with him their hopes, ambitions, joys, and problems. In this capacity the teacher:

- Makes sure each member knows their duties and responsibilities and does them
- Promotes peace and goodwill within the Body of Christ

This is the capacity that the teacher is required to minister in the homes.

### **Deacon's Role in Home Ministry**

In addition to the general shepherding ministry shared by all priesthood, the deacon is "to visit the poor, ascertain their needs, and report the same to the church,"<sup>10</sup> and to visit the homes of widows and minister to their temporal needs. In this capacity the deacon:

- Works closely with the teacher in personal ministry
- Is charged to be the assistant of the teacher in all the teacher's duties

Home ministry can be made more effective through a program of congregational education by sermons, announcements, correspondence, and Sunday school classes. When the families of a congregation is informed about the purposes and objectives of the home ministry program, they are more willing to assist the priesthood in this important ministry.

Redemptive home ministry depends upon the willingness of the priesthood to serve. The most common weakness in a home ministry program is two-fold; lack of desire on the part of the priesthood to serve in the homes, and the specialized functions of the priesthood are ignored in the home ministry effort. If his divine call and the Spirit of Christ do not move upon a priesthood member, he will not succeed in his ministry, and the program will fall short. To properly carry out the God-given task of ministry in the homes of the Saints (Matthew 6:26), the entire priesthood of the branch must be involved in the home ministry program. The presiding elder must inspire the priesthood in the branch and provide training which each man will need in order to minister more effectively.

### **External Priesthood Support in Home Ministry**

Sometimes there are instances where ministry needs cannot be met fully by the priesthood. The branch women's department should be encouraged to have a "Friendly Visiting Program." Sometimes, friendly visitors from the women's department can perform a needed service to the sick and shut-in requiring attention, which it is not possible for the priesthood to give. Sometimes, women will be able to give counsel where men would not be able to do so. This could include such things as childcare, home management, and issues more apt to be better discussed between women. The friendly visiting program should be coordinated with the home ministry of the priesthood, especially when a need for specialized priesthood ministry is uncovered during the course of a friendly visit. Such needs should be reported to the presiding elder or home ministry coordinator.

### **Summary**

The church is commissioned to build up the kingdom. Home ministry is vital to this goal and its general effectiveness will be enhanced when the priesthood recognizes that their office and calling is of a specialized nature, and different from other priesthood offices. Each priesthood office is called to perform a ministry for which no other priesthood office is responsible. An effective teaching and worship in the home will produce these results:

- Promote family unity
- Strengthen family ties to the church
- Increase the baptisms
- Retain the natural increase of the church
- Increase church attendance

- Promote an increase in church participation
- Promote an increase in church financial support
- Stimulate and promote the development of a witnessing people for Christ

**Nevertheless, ye shall go from house to house, teaching the people; and I will go before you.**

**Matthew 6:26**

**Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.**

**II Chronicles 15:3**

**And now all these things did Alma and his fellow laborers do, who were over the church; walking in all diligence, teaching the word of God in all things...**

**Mosiah 11:148**

**The movements toward better understanding of ministerial responsibilities, duties, and goals, and toward unity of endeavor in teaching, preaching, evangelizing, and the perfecting of the Saints, are pleasing to the Lord.**

**D&C 136:3a**

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Marshal, Richard J., Home Teaching with Purpose and Power, Deseret Book Company, pp. 17-18.
- <sup>2</sup> Gospel Essentials, <http://computercontrolsystems.com/GE/index.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> Marshal, Richard J., Home Teaching with Purpose and Power, Deseret Book Company, pp.103-104
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 105
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 100-102
- <sup>6</sup> Office of Priesthood and Leadership Education, The Priesthood Manual, Herald House Publishing, 1964 , pp. 136 – 137.
- <sup>7</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 17:12a
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17:8d
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., 17:11a, b
- <sup>10</sup> General Conference Resolution 471