Do You Want to Make a Difference? Let Them Lead!

By Young Men General Presidency

While speaking with adult leaders and advisers of young men, the question is often asked: "What does this statement mean to you? “Let them Lead”. Most answers are pretty standard and tend to speak of "stepping back and let them take over", or "They hold priesthood keys, they can do it" and of course “shadow leadership”, or “Give them the assignment and if they fail, well, they will learn from it”. As we visit quorums all over the Church, the success of actually seeing the young men lead has proven to be much more difficult and less commonly practiced.

Perhaps we could consider an additional perspective. In D&C 84:106 we read: “And if any man among you be strong in Spirit, (speaking of adult advisers) let him take with him that is weak, (quorum presidency) that he may be edified in all meekness, that he may become strong also.” Several important principles are occurring in this scripture. We have a lead trainer, the adviser or bishopric member who doesn't just teach leadership skills, but who exemplifies the skill and practices with the young man until the skill becomes a strength.

This same principle is taught very effectively in the mission field. It is called “The Training Model.” The mission president is considered to be the lead trainer. He teaches verbally a doctrine or skill he wants the missionaries to learn. He then demonstrates the skill in a role play experience. He will invite the missionaries to practice what he demonstrated and then provide evaluation. The missionaries will continue to practice the skill until they become proficient at it. (Proverbs 22:6) This practice of developing skills is conducted in every training meeting a missionary will attend. Additionally, when a missionary is role playing, he keeps in mind an actual investigator he is working with and the miracle is that the missionary will receive impressions as to the needs of that individual. This training model can occur at home with a parent, in a quorum presidency meeting and during interviews with bishopric members. (HB2 chapter 8).

I recently attended a priest quorum meeting and witnessed this in action. In attendance were six priests and the bishop. The first assistant took the lead, read from an agenda, spoke of their service assignments from the bishop, added final details regarding their week-day activity, and then before turning some time over to the bishop for the lesson, provided training regarding their priesthood duties. (D&C 107:85-87) He spoke specifically of their responsibility to bless the sacrament and the sacred nature of this ordinance for the members of the ward including the importance of how they presented themselves and spoke. He introduced a brand-new priest who was going to be given the opportunity to offer one of the sacrament prayers this same day. He invited all the priests to share their feelings about the ordinance and how they felt the first time they offered the prayer. The assistant then invited all to kneel and he read the blessing on the bread. With this example, he asked the new priest to offer the blessing on the water. I felt as though I was kneeling on sacred ground. There was a powerful and sweet brotherhood between them all. The bishop expressed his deep gratitude for these men and closed with his testimony. Of course, I had to stay for sacrament meeting. continued
"Preparing our Boys for Their Finest Hours"

by Bonnie H. Cordon, 1st Counselor, Primary General Presidency

“To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour” (Sir Winston Churchill, speech given to the House of Parliaments, June 18, 1940).

These words stir something deep inside of me each time I hear them. As I think about our young boys and their immense potential I am reminded of the privilege it is to be a part of their important seasons of preparation. We have the great opportunity as leaders to play an influential role in helping these young boys become prepared and qualified for their finest hour as they develop Christ-like attributes and learn to serve and lead.

Sister Carol F. McConkie said: “To lead in the Savior’s way is a sacred privilege that will require youth to give their very best as they serve the Lord at home, in the Church, and in the community” (Carol F. McConkie, “Teaching Youth How to Lead in the Savior’s Way,” Ensign, October 2015).

We have the opportunity to actively help prepare young men to be leaders. Leadership preparation and application will look different from young man to young man. As leaders, we need to understand for ourselves leadership principles so as to help our young men understand and practice leadership principles for themselves.

One such principle is the principle of returning and reporting. Young men need to understand the importance of this skill and experience success practicing and applying it. If we are to help our young men succeed in learning this vital leadership skill, we need to know where they are personally, know their qualities and strengths, understand their individual limitations, and make sure we give them assignments that will enable them to succeed. In addition, if we are to help them succeed in returning and reporting, we must model this principle ourselves, which will influence our young men in meaningful ways. Following these steps in our own leadership will help ensure success in those we lead, helping them in turn to become successful leaders themselves. One of the reasons young men may fail in their assignments is because we oftentimes fail to help them be fully prepared. Visualize yourself as a trainer and not necessarily as a leader who presides over them. Walk alongside them as they learn to lead and enjoy watching them prepare and qualify themselves for the finest hours that lie ahead for them.

Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence. (D&C 107:99) I asked the bishop if he and I could speak for a moment afterward. I had to know what he was doing. The bishop understood fully the power of training and preparation. Each of the quorums in the ward were holding regular presidency meetings and similar training was provided weekly for these presidencies. The young men were being well trained in their responsibilities and the sacredness of their callings. What was even more interesting to me was that just six months earlier the adult leaders were taking the lead and planning everything for the young men.

“We can raise the bar and vision for these young men, and they will respond. You leaders lift these deacon’s quorum presidents best when you let them lead out and you step back from the spotlight. You have magnified your calling best not when you give a great lesson but when you help them give a great lesson, not when you rescue the one but when you help them do so. There is an old saying: do not die with your music still in you. In like manner, I would say to you adult leaders, do not get released with your leadership skills still in you. Teach our youth at every opportunity; teach them how to prepare an agenda, how to conduct meetings with dignity and warmth, how to rescue the one, how to prepare and give an inspired lesson, and how to receive revelation. This will be the measure of your success—the legacy of leadership and spirituality you leave ingrained in the hearts and minds of these young men.” (Elder Tad R. Callister Ensign, May 2013)

Then they will have become the youth of the noble birthright.

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“Preparing our Boys for Their Finest Hours”

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A Minute with Mark

This summer I spent time at the 2017 National Scout Jamboree held at the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve in West Virginia. The Jamboree was an incredible experience in many ways. Young men and women had exciting and challenging outdoor experiences. Adult leaders served in selfless and amazing ways. People from across our nation—and the world—came together in fellowship and friendship. A good spirit of Scouting was felt by visitors, staff, and participants alike.

However, one of the greatest outcomes of the Jamboree was the relationships that were strengthened. Over 100 dedicated adult leaders served on our LDS staff, teaching in our Duty to God and Country exhibit, helping with the Genealogy and Family Life merit badges, serving as Chaplains throughout the camp, and ministering, sharing, and exemplifying our beliefs. I observed good people from many different faiths reach out to each other, strengthen each other and seek to understand each other.

One memorable experience was the reading of a letter written by President George Washington in 1790 to the Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island. National Commissioner Charles Dahlquist was invited by Rabbi Joseph Prouser to read the letter at a formal gathering of over 200 Scouts and leaders. In the letter, President George Washington stated that the United States will assure freedom for all and that “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

On Saturday at the Jewish Shabbat Evening Service, Brother Douglas D. Holmes, 1st Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency was invited to read portions of the 1841 prayer offered by Elder Orson Hyde over Jerusalem. What a powerful experience that was to hear one of the general officers of our Church read portions of that historic prayer!

Thousands of visitors came into the Church exhibit with questions about religion. The main focus of our exhibits was the Savior. The Scouts loved the spirit that was felt there. They enjoyed sitting and observing the mural of the Savior. They asked honest and deep questions about God and religion. And they left being touched by what they saw and felt.

A pivotal part of the LDS-BSA partnership is the relationships that are built. The Jamboree exemplifies these relationships. I am grateful for this inspired partnership.

I am frequently asked about the future of the LDS-BSA partnership and the reasons for the new activity program for Young Men ages 14 and older. I don’t know the future but I follow a living prophet, seer, and revelator, President Thomas S. Monson. I trust his guidance and direction. There are many benefits to the new program. We can and should implement it with our full hearts.

My family has had the opportunity to move to and live in many beautiful places including Santa Clara, Utah; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Casper, Wyoming. Each time we move we fix up the house we are in. We paint it, put new carpet in the bedrooms, plant fruit trees and flowers, and do all we can to make a haven where we live. We have a deep love for each house we have owned and each town we have called home. In the same way, I had a deep love for the Varsity and Venturing programs. Many of us did all we could to implement those programs and many lives were blessed, including the lives of my own sons. However, now we have a new program. I will move forward with full purpose of heart, painting new rooms, planting fruit trees, and helping the adults and youth I serve with to thrive as we begin to implement this new program in 2018. I trust our prophet and I know many blessings will come from these changes.

Thank you to the many LDS-BSA Relationships committees across our nation who are building good relationships through our Scouting partnership. Please let me know how I can continue to support and assist you.

Yours in Scouting,

Mark R. Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships Director
Mac's Message—Let the Boys Lead: A Core Principle in Scouting and the Aaronic Priesthood

By Mac McIntire, LDS-BSA Relationships Blog contributor

One of the major tenets of the Boy Scouts of America is that each Scouting unit should be boy-led. This is in perfect harmony with the Lord’s principle for Aaronic Priesthood young men.

A famous Abbott and Costello comical skit shows how confusing it can be when you don't know who's on first. "My house is a house of order, saith the Lord God." (D&C 132:18). There should be no confusion in the Lord's Church as to who is in charge in Aaronic Priesthood quorums.

The exercise of priesthood authority in the Church is governed by those who hold priesthood keys. The bishop holds the keys over the priests quorum. The teachers and deacons quorum presidents hold keys over their respective quorums. "Keys are the rights of presidency, or the power given to man by God to preside, direct, control, and govern God’s priesthood on earth. Priesthood holders called to positions of presidency receive keys from those in authority over them. Priesthood holders use the priesthood only within the limits outlined by those who hold the keys." (Handbook 2: Administering the Church [2010], 2.1.1). The LDS Scouting Handbook makes it clear that quorum advisers are not to preside over meetings, but are to assist and advise those who do preside (5.3).

Please note that you, as a Young Men leader (except the bishop), have no right to preside, direct, control, or govern the affairs of the priests, teachers, or deacons quorum. You have no right to conduct or lead quorum meetings without being directed to do so by him who holds the keys. You should not usurp control or governance over the quorum. The Doctrine and Covenants explains deacons and teachers are to "invite all to come unto Christ." (D&C 20:59). This is done under the direction of the quorum president, who holds the authorized keys. Your role in the quorum is to honor the quorum president's priesthood keys by teaching, training, and mentoring the young man whose right and privilege it is to preside. The Scouting EDGE method of explain, demonstrate, guide, and enable is a great platform to fulfill your advisory role.

In your calling with the young men the Lord wants you to recede into the shadows. One of the key purposes of Scouting is to "train boys to lead boys." The Aaronic Priesthood program is designed to help each young man to "serve faithfully in priesthood callings and fulfill the responsibilities of priesthood offices," "to prepare to serve an honorable full-time mission," and to "prepare to become a worthy husband and father." (Handbook 2: Administering the Church [2010], 8.1.3). Each of these roles requires leadership abilities.

Young men cannot learn to lead from behind. Your boys will become more faithful priesthood leaders, missionaries, husbands, and fathers if you give them ample opportunities to practice their leadership skills. The Young Men and Scouting programs are perfect stepping stones to missionary work. When carried out properly, these programs prepare boys to become "elders" by teaching them self-motivation, self-direction, and self-accountability—the very attributes they will need on their mission.

In the mission field nobody else plans the young man's day. No one makes his appointments. No one checks on his daily obedience. He is responsible for himself. Young men need six years of leadership experience in the Aaronic Priesthood so that when they are on their mission they can concentrate on serving the Lord rather than trying to learn what they should have learned under your tutelage.

There is a reason why you are called an adviser to the Young Men. Your role can best be defined as that of a mentor to the boys. The dictionary describes a mentor as "a trusted friend, counselor, or teacher; usually a more experienced person." A mentor advises and guides a boy, but never takes over. He shares his knowledge and insights but respects the agency of the boy to do things his own way. He gently admonishes and nurtures the young man to help him mature in his position. A righteous adult Young Men leader ensures the boy is at the forefront of all activities instead of himself.

The boys should be the choreographers and actors of all that occurs on the performance stage in Young Men and Scouting. When you resist the temptation to take over you allow your young men to grow into the next generation of Church leaders. A young man who learns to lead and take upon himself the burdens of those he serves will strengthen his testimony as he sees the Church in action through the magnifying of his priesthood calling.
The Scout-led Troop Blog: Stories about How We “Let Them Lead”

By Bill Chapman, LDS-BSA Relationships The Scout-led Troop Blog

I recently asked some of the Scouters I have worked with in the past to share some of their favorite stories about the “Scout-led troop.” In response, one of them sent me the picture below with the caption, “Where are the adults?”

Of course, the adults were close enough where they could see and observe the Scouts, but not so close that they interfered with the dynamic of a group of boys running their own program (remember that in LDS units, the senior patrol leader is typically the deacons quorum president.)

The following is from Mike Smith, Scoutmaster, Troop 736, Orange County California Council: “Once the boy-led culture is established, it will perpetuate itself, unless the leaders take over. Case in point was our recent change in senior patrol leader to Andrew. When Andrew became our senior patrol leader (SPL), I took it upon myself to sit down with him just prior to the beginning of patrol leader’s council (PLC—our troop holds PLC from 8:30 pm to 9:00 pm at the end of each troop meeting). As I began to explain the role of an SPL along with what a PLC is and what we’re trying to accomplish, Andrew gave me the strangest look and mentioned (as I recall), “Yes, I get it.” Meaning, “I know what an SPL is and how a PLC should run, now go away.”

Luckily, I immediately understood from his tone and body language that I really should let him be. I moved away from the PLC table and then watched him conduct a very efficient PLC meeting. What did I miss or forget in this instance? Well, Andrew had been a patrol leader and assistant patrol leader in this troop for a long time. He had been to numerous PLCs and had watched several SPLs lead. Because of our troop’s boy-led culture, he already knew what needed to be done. He just needed the Scoutmaster to get out of the way!

Another experience: My favorite story on this topic comes from a Scouting for Food experience. We met one Saturday morning to do Scouting for Food in mid-November. The troop met at 8:45am and began horsing around until 9:00am at which point one of the Scoutmasters reminded the SPL that we had planned to start the food drive at 9:00am. Our SPL took charge and asked for an opening prayer, which was offered, and then proceeded to organize/assign Scouts to various cars for rides. This particular morning, several of the Scouts’ mothers were providing transportation. As the SPL worked through the assignments, a couple of mothers spoke up (without being asked) and offered various approaches to assigning Scouts to rides and covering the various areas. We Scoutmasters got their attention and subtly asked them to let the SPL lead.

A long (for the mothers) 15 minutes later, we all left the parking lot and were our way to do Scouting for Food. In this case, the adults saw a lack of efficiency and were just trying to ‘help out’ and we probably could have been on our way in three minutes vs. fifteen. However, the leadership opportunity FOR THE SCOUT would have been missed. Moms/Dads lead at home all of the time and, in this particular case, we know they could have provided a quick, efficient solution to the problem. However, Scouting is for the Scout to practice leadership and he’s not going to be very efficient. As soon as we realize this, stepping back and letting the “inefficient” SPL lead becomes easy and enjoyable. Watch it happen in front of you vs. trying to "fix" the problem in record time as an adult.

The following is from Pete Pulido, Assistant Scoutmaster, Troop 736, Orange County California Council: Josh serving as SPL for summer camp 2016 has got to go down as a prime example of a boy-led troop. I think the key piece that made him different was he had his own vision of how and what the troop needed to accomplish at camp and he was determined to lead the troop down that path. Next thing we know, he drafts an email of his expectations and sends it to all Scouts and Scout families. Up at camp, though I thought it a little thing, all Scouters had a hand in making a one-of-a-kind walking staff for Josh, symbolic of his able leadership of the troop. We gave it to him at the closing fireside. The look on Josh’s face was priceless. He had summited the mountain and everyone knew it. There was deafening spontaneous cheering from the Scouts. It was a shared moment for everyone involved, only realized because adult leadership pulled back and gave Josh the space to lead.
Let them Lead—Safely!

Contributed by Steven Hoskins, LDS Risk Management Division

As part of the Young Men Auxiliary Training, the Young Men General Presidency made a direct plea to the leaders of the Church’s Young Men to help their young men become converted to Jesus Christ and to fulfill their divine roles. One of the three ways they said to do that is to "Let them Lead."

Some will maintain that good leaders are born, not made, and there is not much a Young Men leader can do about letting them lead—they either can or cannot. Not so fast! The Center for Creative Leadership conducted a study and in March 2012 issued its conclusions which found 52.4% of corporate executives believe leaders are made while only 19% believed leaders were born. Undoubtedly the Lord knows who is capable of leading and asks the Melchizedek Priesthood leaders to assist. It’s time to get to work. So, what is the best way to "Let them lead?" And, just as important, what is the best way to let them lead safely? One answer to that is to teach them. What is the best way to teach leadership skills? There is no more effective way than to turn to the Boy Scouts of America that has been teaching boys how to lead for a very long time. From the very inception of the Scouting movement, the impetus was on “boy run” troops. It knows how to teach boys leadership skills.

There are three great resources from the Boy Scouts which can provide a leader of young men a virtual blueprint for how to teach leadership skills to that young leader so that, when he is given the opportunity to lead, he will be successful. These resources are the Senior Patrol Leader Handbook, the Patrol Leader Handbook, and the Troop Leadership Training Handbook.

The Boy Scouts use ten principles (ever hear about teaching correct principles before?):

1. Keep your word
2. Be fair to all
3. Be a good communicator
4. Be flexible
5. Be organized
6. Delegate
7. Set an example
8. Be consistent
9. Give praise
10. Ask for help

If those ten leadership skills are incorporated with the twelve points of the Scout Law, Aaronic Priesthood quorums will be turning out incredible men.

There is a point number eleven which should be added—lead safely. No amount of leadership skill development will matter much unless the young man is encouraged to lead safely. Thus, as you the leader help the young man learn the leadership skills necessary to be a successful leader, make sure to include in that instruction training on safety. While there are many safety training concepts (see safety.lds.org for some examples), a very effective tool for safety training is having the safety moment.

A safety moment is a concise talk about a specific safety topic relevant to whatever activity the quorum, pack or troop will be engaged. A safety moment should be related to the specific safety issues which might be encountered during the activity. It should be presented, whenever possible, by the youth leader as part of the “let them lead” effort from the Young Men General Presidency.  

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To help the adult leaders teach the safety moment training concept to their youth there are several ideas which, if followed, will make the safety moment more effective and memorable:

The safety moment should be practical by identifying the specific risks and mitigation plans of the activity in which you are about to engage—for example, the need for a buddy when swimming. Include personal experiences, both positive and negative, such as “remember that time when Joe almost got lost on our hike? How do we make sure that does not happen again?” Do not discourage your youth leader from using the type of media and tools youth use to communicate today.

“Moment” means safety moment, not safety hour. Be brief and to the point. Remember, the average gold fish has an attention span of 9 seconds but the average youth only 8 seconds (Time Health, May 13, 2015).

Encourage interaction. Instead of giving a lecture, get the whole troop or quorum involved.

Teach your young men to add a little entertainment to the safety moment discussion (something that could also be used in some quorum meetings) by adding humor. The attention span noted above could be expanded and the message is likely to be more memorable.

There are many tools available to help with the safety moment (see e.g. http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/HealthandSafety/Safety_Moments.aspx and https://www.saltlakescouts.org/January-SunSafety). The Safety Moment can also be the source of great reflection for your youth. By following the principles noted above not only will you help your boys be better leaders but safer ones as well.
Stake Leaders and Families attend the Priesthood Leadership Conference on Scouting

By Nettie Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships volunteer

On a Saturday afternoon in July, carloads of travel-weary but excited families drive up a tree-lined road at the Philmont Training Center in northeastern New Mexico. Members of the Young Men and Primary General Presidencies greet the vehicles of parents and children as they arrive at the Priesthood Leadership Conference on Scouting, a week-long training experience for stake presidencies and their families.

The conference occurs under the direction of the Young Men and Primary General Presidencies and the Young Men Board with support from the LDS-BSA Relationships Director and Administrative Assistant. This year marks the 54th anniversary of the event. During the two sessions, 275 priesthood leaders from 108 stakes and 46 BSA councils participated, with attending family members totaling over 1000 people.

“The Priesthood Leadership Conference on Scouting is the ideal example of the Church and the Boy Scouts working together to strengthen young men,” observed Mark Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships Director. “This summer there was a particularly powerful, sweet, unifying spirit throughout the conference.”

The conference is hosted by the Boy Scouts of America at its premier training facility at the Philmont Scout Ranch. Each summer nearly 25,000 Scouts hike the wilderness backcountry of the 140,000-acre ranch. The stunning landscape, blue skies, and grand mountains create a beautiful environment for attendees at the adjacent training center.

During their week at Philmont, families live in a “tent city,” eat meals together in the dining hall, participate in activities, and make friends from across the nation. Bringing good families together creates an extraordinary environment.

“I sent two of my youth out on the trek,” participant Chris Chase, a stake Young Men president from Bismarck, ND, said. “I have one daughter and my wife here in camp, and they’re having an excellent time. They’re making friends with people that they’ve never met before. It’s awesome.”

Families arrive on Saturday afternoon and spend Sunday attending and participating in church meetings in the “Philmont Ward,” efficiently organized with callings filled by participants. They then have ample time on Sunday afternoon to be with family members and rest on the Sabbath Day.

Classes for the brethren begin early Monday morning after a camp flag ceremony. Fulfilling My Duty to God, Strengthening Deacons Quorums Using Scouting, Primary and Scouting for 8- to 11-Year-Old Boys, and other Aaronic Priesthood topics—including the new activity program for older Young Men—are the subjects of formal class sessions for the brethren. Additionally, “Q&A with presidency and board” sessions provide a circle setting in which to discuss with and learn from Church and BSA leaders.

“Questions come in during the week relating to the priesthood, to Scouting, to Cub Scouting,” shared Brother Francis. “The faculty answers those questions with particular input from General Church leaders.” The feedback from participants in these round-robin sessions has been very positive.

“The purpose of these two conference weeks at Philmont is to help the stake leaders understand how the Gospel directly relates and correlates with Scouting,” observed conference participant David Wilding, from Brigham City, Utah. AJ Gilmore from Corinne, UT said. “There’s a reason that the Church leadership has chosen the Boy Scouts of America as the activity arm for young men. It’s because they’ve looked at the program, and they see that it has good values.”

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This summer, interest was piqued regarding the recent changes in the Church activity program for older boys. “Everyone has questions about the new program,” commented Brother Francis. “Everyone wonders ‘why’ the changes, and ‘how’ do we implement them. First of all, we follow the prophet. Additionally, these changes simply reflect what has already been taking place in most teacher and priest quorums. Young Men who want to continue in Scouting still have that opportunity, while the older boys can plan their own activities with the direction and guidance of their leaders. Each of us should implement these changes with full purpose of heart.”

While the brethren are in classes, children go off with their age-group leaders to ride horses, do crafts, hike, play games, tour museums, and participate in other activities including a week-long backpacking option for teens ages fourteen and older. Mothers are free to also enjoy camp activities, attend sessions with the Primary General Presidency, or just read a book and relish a quiet moment.

“How can we as women and mothers assist young men in preparing for their priesthood roles?” asked Sister Bonnie H. Cordon, 2nd Counselor in the Primary General Presidency, during one women’s session. “Our little ones are facing huge challenges. They need the Savior. Sometimes we underestimate the abilities of our boys and we overestimate their experiences. As we give them opportunities to lead they will gain confidence. Oh how we want boys—and girls—to be disciples of Christ because they have taken upon themselves at the age of eight the name of Christ. What our children were once facing in their early teens they are now facing earlier. We’re stepping up our game in this war.”

Morning flag ceremonies involve Boy Scouts, 11-year-old Scouts, and Cub Scouts. Evening family activities include campfire programs, a camp-wide family home evening, family banner parade, Primary parade, and a western buffalo barbecue.

“I’ve met so many incredible women and families here,” commented Tonia Wensel from the West Jordan Utah Sunset Ridge Stake.

“People call Philmont a Zion place, and for us it is,” participant Kristi Wangsgard, whose husband serves on the stake high council, from Ogden, UT said. “People are just cooperative, the nature is beautiful and the staff is hardworking and attentive. But probably more than that it’s just that there’s a feeling of peace and friendliness here, and the beauty that’s all around you, it just can’t be beat.”

“We have had our hearts connected this week,” noted Sister Joy D. Jones, Primary General President, during the closing graduation ceremony.

“Remember this one, brief shining moment called ‘Philmont’,” added Brother Stephen W. Owen, Young Men General President, referencing the story Camelot during his closing remarks. “Things matter in our lives. Remember what you learned here. Eternity will be like this.”
For LDS young men and adults attending the 2017 National Scout Jamboree in southern Virginia during its 10-day run in late July, the Church’s presence could be found in some of the usual, visible places and in the usual, apparent ways — a Sunday morning sacrament meeting for several thousand, a popular exhibit at the Duty to God and Country pavilion, and a guiding presence at two prominent merit badge booths.

As such, spiritual messages and reassurances were available through participation at the worship service and firesides and at the exhibit and booths, with planning, materials, resources and staffing provided by the Church’s Family History and Temple departments under the direction of the Young Men general presidency.

But similar messages of encouragement and counsel and reminders of potential and promise were also on the move, going beyond the aforementioned set locations. Those messages and reminders were taken to the few and to the one by Church leaders and LDS chaplains through in-camp visits and one-on-one interactions by volunteers staffing the exhibit and booths.

“We want to give them a heart-bump — we want them to feel the Spirit,” said Jim Greene of Family History’s priesthood and area support division. He may have been speaking specifically about the efforts at the Genealogy merit badge booth, but those “heart-bumps” carried over to the other locations and through the personal interactions.

At the Church’s Duty to God and Country exhibit, visitors could earn the 2017 Compass Award. The physical award, on a band to be worn around the neck, featured a metal ring encompassing a spinning, ball-like compass, with the phrase “Decisions determine destiny” inscribed around the ring.

Beyond the physical award, the spiritual reward came as LDS and non-LDS Scouts and leaders fulfilled requirements and electives, some of which included visiting the Genealogy and Family Life merit badge booths, making new friends, sharing one’s testimony, attending sacrament services, watching brief videos and memorizing both James 1:5-6 and a short quote on God’s encompassing love from President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, second counselor in the First Presidency.

The intent is to have exhibit visitors consider life’s purpose and basic fundamentals through a brief, simple exposure to the plan of salvation, said Stan Child, who helped staff the Compass Award area. “They feel something here,” he added.

Ben Ivins, 15, of Taylorsville, Utah, reflected on the values associated with the Compass Award. “I might lose this later, but I’ll never forget it,” he said of the physical award and the efforts to earn it. “It will help shape us in whatever we do in the future — our missions, our education, our families.”
Ben Francis, a 20-year-old from Kaysville, Utah, had attended two previous jamborees as a youth. This time, less than two weeks after returning from his full-time mission to Denmark, he assisted in staffing the Compass Award exhibit. And the highlight of his third jamboree? “I think all the wonderful teaching opportunities I’ve had here and the discussions I’ve had about God with Scouts of other faiths,” he answered.

At the large Genealogy tent area, Scouts could work on requirements — and actually earn the merit badge at the jamboree. Individuals filled out pedigree and group sheets, conducted interviews with a parent or grandparent over cell phones, “toured” a genealogical repository by watching a five-minute video detailing the Granite Mountain Records Vault in the canyons east of Salt Lake City and discovered online records at an improvised family history center, complete with a dozen PCs connected to a direct, high-speed Internet line. “This is where those big heart-bumps occur,” said Greene of boys — often in tears — as they found historical documents of grandparents or other deceased ancestors through family history records. "They're seeing people they haven't met before."

Added Brent Summerhayes, also of the Family History Department: “It’s truly a tent in the wilderness — one to feel the spirit of Elijah.”

The Family Life booth tent replicated a home of sorts, as requirements were posted enabling Scouts to work on them in a makeshift living room, family room and kitchen. Visitors could get a good start on the merit badge, which is mandatory in order to earn the Eagle Scout rank, but it required more time involvement in individual and family projects at home in order to be completed.

Church leaders and chaplains also aided in individual and small-group visits, including in-camp interactions and discussions, where they met with Scouts to celebrate successions, to uplift and to counsel regarding homesickness and individual concerns.

Brother Owen underscored the importance of activities and associations for young men. “Relationships matter — you just can’t just expect a young man to come to class and just learn,” he told the Church News during his three-day visit to the jamboree. “There has to be a balanced approach — you have the spiritual side, but you also need the social and the physical and the intellectual things that we work on with the young men.”

Brother Douglas D. Holmes, first counselor in the Young Men general presidency, made evening visits to subcamp sites where smaller LDS groups of Scouts gathered, having come from all across the country and other international areas.

In several visits with Scouts from North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, California and Hawaii one night, he encouraged the young men to continue to make connections in remaining strong in the gospel — connection with good friends, parents and family members and leaders. “They’ll be anchors for you when times get tough,” he said.

He also encouraged them to stay connected with heaven through the Holy Ghost and to be more than just self-confident in life. “If I could encourage you to do one thing, it would be to develop God-confidence,” Brother Holmes said, playing on the Scout tradition of trading patches by encouraging his listeners “to trade your strength for God’s strength.”