Meeting the Needs of the One

By Young Men General Presidency

Recently, the Young Men General Presidency, along with all General Authorities and Officers received a charge from The First Presidency—to reduce and simplify. What does this charge mean for you and the Aaronic Priesthood holders you lead? The answer will be different for each quorum and perhaps for each young man. Perhaps a good place to start is to prayerfully consider this question: “What are the needs of each young man in the quorum?”

As you think about the needs of the young men and the invitation to reduce and simplify, you might be inspired to review what has been done in the past, as well as what should be done going forward. For example, are your meetings as effective as they could be? If they were more effective, could you eliminate some unnecessary meetings? How effective have your activities been, and what can be done to make them even more meaningful in the future?

“Reduce and simplify” does not mean we should care less about the young men or reduce our efforts to help them. But it does mean that we should be more efficient and purposeful in our efforts. And this requires careful planning and preparation. It requires personal revelation to determine what is truly important. It means focusing less on programs and more on meeting the needs of the one, and it applies not only to adult leaders but also to each quorum president. As we do this, the windows of heaven will open, and we will be prompted to find ways to stay close to each young man—to “be with them,” “connect them with heaven,” and “let them lead.”

Frequently when new Young Men leaders are called, they create their own programs or try to imitate what they saw their leaders do when they were young. Unfortunately, they sometimes do this without seeking personal revelation or trying to understand the individual needs of the young men. They miss the blessings from heaven that inspired leaders are entitled to.

Using the Church’s handbooks and other resources can guide your efforts to reduce and simplify—they help you identify what can and cannot be adapted to meet your local needs, and they help you avoid creating unnecessary burdens on leaders and families. Here are some of these resources:

1. **Handbook 2: Administering in the Church, section 8**
2. **Scouting Handbook for Church Units in the United States**
3. The Youth Activities Planner (see lds.org/youth/activities/planner)
4. The Talent and Interest Survey found on LDS.org
5. Local resources near your unit that can be used to create meaningful activities for young men
6. BSA’s resources

When the teachers and priest activities program was presented earlier this year, it was clarified that the main purpose of Young Men activities in the Church is “building young men with strong testimonies in the Lord Jesus Christ, helping them magnify their priesthood duties, and preparing them to fulfill their divine roles as righteous husbands and fathers.” Focusing all we do on this purpose may be the best way to fulfill the First Presidency’s charge to reduce and simplify.
In the recent October General Conference, Elder David A. Bednar taught us, “One of the great challenges each of us faces every day is to not allow the concerns of this world to so dominate our time and energy that we neglect the eternal things that matter most.” (David A. Bednar, "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises, Ensign, Nov. 2017)

With all our many responsibilities and busy schedules, how do we use valuable family time to teach eternal principles our children need to navigate their future?

Simplifying might be the answer.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said, “The search for the best things inevitably leads to the foundational principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the simple and beautiful truths revealed to us by a caring, eternal, and all-knowing Father in Heaven. There is a beauty and clarity that comes from simplicity that we sometimes do not appreciate in our thirst for intricate solutions.” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Of Things that Matter Most,” Ensign, Nov. 2010)

In an effort to simplify, consider this question: Do you spend your energies creating elaborate and time consuming “bells and whistles” or are you focusing on the fundamentals and creating meaningful and personal relationships?

Remember: It is one thing to have a busy life and another to have a meaningful life.

One family who has been successful in combining the areas of family, Scouting and the gospel is the Varble Family. Kevin and Janet Varble have eleven children, seven of whom are boys and four are girls. When asked how they were able to motivate all seven boys in obtaining their Eagle Scout rank by the age of thirteen, the reply was simple: “It is just something we did as a family.”

Kevin and Janet made a decision early in their marriage to combine valuable family time with Scouting time. There were many times the whole family would participate in completing the activity assigned to the merit badge. This often required a lot of traveling, camping, becoming familiar with different businesses and, of course, exploring museums and other points of interest.

The Varbles soon realized Scouting was teaching their boys foundational principles that were in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ such as:

* Helping their children gain knowledge
* Teaching them how to learn for themselves
* Gaining confidence in themselves
* Teaching them how to handle challenging situations
* Obtaining an increased desire to follow through and complete tasks
* Teaching their boys to set goals and accomplish them
* Last and most importantly – Scouting brought their family together

Brother Varble said, “We are not just building Eagle Scouts; we are building missionaries, fathers, and community leaders.”

Sister Varble added, “Not only did we make future leaders out of our boys, but we made family traditions that would last forever, from generation to generation.”

President Uchtdorf continues his counsel by saying, “The wise understand and resist the temptation to get caught up in the frantic rush of everyday life. In short, they focus on the things that matter most. Strength comes from placing our attention and efforts on the basics of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In the end, the goal in developing young men and families is to bring them closer to Jesus Christ and teach them principles of leadership, character, and charity.

Like the Varble family, let us simplify our lives. Let us focus our families on the fundamentals of life, which in turn leads to true discipleship and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
A Minute with Mark—Simple Scouting

Last month I had the opportunity to attend and support an Aaronic Priesthood Leadership training conference on Scouting involving five stakes. Cub Scout, Primary, Aaronic Priesthood and Scout leaders were invited to attend. During my presentation one of the five stake presidents raised his hand to ask a question. He then spontaneously joined me at the pulpit and tearfully shared that his Scouting experiences had changed and blessed his life. I was touched by his genuine feelings and bold declaration.

This example is not isolated. As I visit with people and serve in Scouting and in the Church I often hear touching stories of young men who were lost, less-active, or members of other faiths and yet had their lives changed for the better by good priesthood and Primary leaders who reached out and welcomed them to the gospel through the vehicle of Scouting.

When President Joseph F. Smith approved Scouting as an official program of the Aaronic Priesthood in 1913, he did so at the recommendation of the Young Men Athletic Committee. These brethren shared with President Smith that one benefit they felt Scouting would provide LDS youth was the “association of our boys with their fellows.” I believe this phrase still rings true today.

Our current Young Men General Presidency has asked leaders to focus on three tasks: Be With Them, Connect Them With Heaven, and Let Them Lead. Scouting provides a natural conduit to all of these goals with strong LDS youth, less-active youth, and youth that are members of other faiths. It’s that simple, really.

One of the keys of maintaining a quality Scouting program and reaching these three ideals is through utilizing Scout committees. On a recent Sunday as I left the chapel to go home I passed a classroom with the door partially ajar. Inside the room I observed our ward Scout committee chairman—gathered with at least 12 other Aaronic Priesthood and Primary leaders—engaged in meaningful conversation about boys. I didn’t overhear their entire meeting, but I can imagine that they coordinated plans for upcoming activities and advancements, talked specifically about boys in the troop, and inspired each other to reach out to young men. The Scout committee is a powerful tool for finding and strengthening youth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Cub Committees can function similarly. Cub Scouting is an ideal opportunity for families in our wards to reach out to families in our neighborhoods and “associate with their fellows,” providing invitations for good people of all faiths to benefit from Scouting under priesthood direction.

There are three keys points to holding a successful but simple committee meeting:

1. Have an agenda. An agenda helps those conducting the meeting to stay on task and provides all participants with a clear vision of what the meeting is meant to accomplish.

2. Stick to principles. It’s easy to get caught up in the “Law of Moses” way of living, especially in an involved Scout program. But when we follow the example of the “happy” people in 4th Nephi verse 16, we learn that they had given up the Law of Moses for the simple “commandments which they had received from their Lord...” (verse 12). Remember the direction of our leaders: Be With Them, Connect Them With Heaven, Let Them Lead.

3. Finally, make the meeting worth their time. Engage in quality discussion, quality planning, and quality decisions. Be consistent so that committee members know when to expect a meeting and what to expect. An amazing synergy is developed when good people gather together to work for the benefit of youth.

Like the stake president who stood and spoke during our recent training I, too, have been changed because of good Scouting and priesthood leaders. I have also seen marvelous changes in the lives of my four Scouting sons because of dedicated leaders who keep it simple, make it fun, and provide a quality program for our boys and young men. And I’m grateful that this effort reaches—as the Young Men leaders of 1913 predicted—to “fellowship the boys of our nation.”
Mac’s Message—Get on Your Knees

By Mac McIntire, LDS-BSA Relationships Blog contributor

The theme for this month’s newsletter is about how simple the Scouting program can be. The words Scouting and simple in the same sentence seem to be an oxymoron. I don’t believe I’ve ever heard any adult Aaronic Priesthood leader say, “Scouting in the Church is simple.”

Providing a quality Scouting program is hard work. Getting properly trained leaders takes a lot of time. Doing Scouting right requires multiple people, a lot of money, and access to a great amount of material resources. Shelves of manuals provided by the BSA attest to the complexity of the numerous programs and sub-programs within Scouting. Getting boys registered and tracking merit badge achievement and rank advancement can be an administrative nightmare. Motivating young men to want to participate in Scouting is not a simple matter.

At least that’s how it seems. Yet I’ve repeatedly said that Scouting in the Church simply boils down to finding ways to achieve the eight purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood outlined in 8.1.3 of Handbook 2.

Whatever achieves one or more of those eight purposes is the right thing to do, and whatever neglects those eight purposes or detracts from those purposes is the wrong thing to do. If a well-run Scouting unit helps achieve those eight purposes, do it. If working diligently on merit badges and rank advancement helps a young man to "become converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ" or to "serve faithfully in priesthood callings," use it. If more joint activities with the young women will teach a young man to "give proper respect to women, girls, and children" or to "become a worthy husband and father," schedule more of them. If taking a young man with you to visit the widow, the widower, the homeless, the sick, the poor, or the needy will help him learn to "give meaningful service," take him with you. If riding bikes, backpacking, cooking, camping, first aid, wilderness survival, and other outdoor activities will help a young man to "prepare to serve an honorable full-time mission," get him outside.

May I suggest that the simplest way to ensure you are doing Scouting right—or doing the Aaronic Priesthood program right—is to get on your knees in prayer. Ask the Lord what He wants you to do to help the young men within your stewardship. Listen and respond to the answers you receive from your prayers. Ponder and reflect to discern the right thing to do for your youth. Prayer is the Lord's program. Inspiration and revelation are the Lord's manual. Making decisions on your knees, instead of your own thinking, is the way to know what is right. It's that simple.

In the spirit of keeping things simple regarding your Scouting and Aaronic Priesthood program, let me simply say, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3: 5-6).
Scouting is simple. Boys organize into patrols. The patrol leader leads. The patrols plan their own activities. They have fun with their friends. They are responsible for making things happen. They pack their own packs. They plan their own meals. They are responsible. They cook, camp, hike, swim, and climb. Mostly in the great outdoors. They do the things Scouts do. They learn by doing. They strive to fulfill the purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood. They live the Scout Oath, the Scout Law, and the Outdoor Code. They do a good turn daily. They are prepared.

Why do they do these things? Because they like the adventure of the outdoors. They want to be with their friends. They want to have fun. But to get what they want, they have to play by the rules. The rules are the Scout Oath and Law. They must do the things that Scouts do. They are not a baseball team. They are a quorum and part of the Boy Scouts of America.

One time I asked one of our Scouts why he liked to go camping. A big smile grew on his face and he said, “Because my Mom’s not here.” This is not a put-down on moms. It is simply an acknowledgment of the fact that teenage boys are at a point in their lives when they start feeling the need for a little independence. And, that is a good thing.

There is an unwritten compact. They play by the rules and we get them where they want to go. Freedom for a young man is exhilarating. He will make many sacrifices to try his hand at doing things his own way. When challenges occur, he will rise to the occasion. He will surprise us with what he can accomplish.

He will fight to get a stove going at altitude when it is 20 degrees. He will hike through the mountains when he is hungry, tired, and cold. He will share his food with his buddy when his buddy spills his in the dirt. He will clean up a campsite because it is his duty. He will collect fast offerings and attend the Temple. He will show respect to women, girls, and children. He wears his uniform. He does all of these things because he feels responsible. He has an ownership interest in his patrol.

A Scout feels responsible when he has helped plan an activity, has helped make decisions, and knows his friends are counting on him. If he fails, he learns he can get up and do it again. When a Scout takes responsibility, he develops character. As he learns he is part of a team, he becomes a good citizen and a good quorum member. This is learning by doing, not academics. It is different than reading a book. In school, a boy learns from books. Reading and learning from books is a good thing. But in Scouts, a boy learns by going outside and making his way. Boy Scouts go places and do things. They live life.

The “Aims of Scouting” are “character development, citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness.” Ironically, the aims are achieved when things go wrong. When things go wrong, young minds are challenged to come up with solutions. They must overcome obstacles to make things happen. Determination is developed.

When we focus too much on the outward appearances of the program, we lose sight of our purpose. Our purpose is to change hearts. To change hearts we must love our Scouts. We must be patient. We must be forgiving. We must trust them. When we focus on the simple things of Scouting, lives are changed. Hearts are touched. The aims of Scouting and the purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood are achieved.
Safety Moment – Get the 411...

What do nuclear power plants, construction sites, aircraft carriers, and many hospitals have in common with Scouting? All constantly look for ways to eliminate hazards that could be life altering or fatal. One tool used by many safety-conscious groups is the safety moment or briefing that starts each meeting or activity with a pause to discuss a hazard or risk that can be prevented. The safety moment focuses the attention of the group on safety and how to achieve it. That’s the “why” of the safety moment. Let’s address the “who, what, when, where, and how” next.

Who can deliver a safety moment? Anyone who is willing to be prepared and to step up. Ideally, each Scout or Scouter (with some preparation) could step up and make a difference within his or her unit or group.

When and where should a safety moment be delivered? At the beginning of a meeting or just before an activity—especially one that has some risk such as shooting, climbing, or aquatic activities.

What makes a great safety moment? Almost anything that focuses or educates the audience on a safety topic. The BSA publishes several safety moments, and new topics are being developed on a regular basis. Other topics can include the use of checklists or safety tools such as PAUSE or focus on something such as hydration, safe driving, or simply the location of fire extinguishers or evacuation routes. The Guide to Safe Scouting, the Scouting Safely website, and the Health and Safety newsletters are also great sources of ideas. If you have information that’s accurate, don’t shy away from discussing injuries or other incidents that occurred during a recent outing as long as the focus is on learning and prevention. Make it simple and easy to understand, and help the learners know how to apply the message.

How should the message be delivered? All messages should be delivered using facts and simple language and should be appropriate to the audience. Using a handout, slides, or a demonstration will help assure that those who hear the message understand it and know how to apply it. The message should be delivered in just a few minutes. Don’t belabor the point or make it difficult.

This message is provided by BSA’s Health and Safety website: http://www.scouting.org/Home/HealthandSafety.aspx

4.3 Scouting Committees

The bishopric organizes ward Scouting committees to ensure that Scouting functions properly as a supporting activity for Aaronic Priesthood young men and for boys ages 8 through 11. The bishopric calls several capable adults (including fathers and mothers of boys and young men) to serve as committee members. One of the committee members is called to serve as the chairperson.

Qualified adults, including those who are not members of the Church, may serve on these committees. Each committee should include a member of the bishopric.

A Scouting committee can be as large as needed to carry out its responsibilities to the individual Scouting units. Where leadership or the number of young men or boys is limited, one committee could represent all young men of Aaronic Priesthood age and another committee could represent Cub Scouting.

When more than one Scouting committee exists in the ward, members of the Primary presidency should be assigned as follows: (1) the member responsible for the 11-year-old boys serves on the Boy Scout troop committee, and (2) the member responsible for boys ages 8 to 10 serves on the Cub Scout pack committee.

Scouting Committees:

1. Meet as needed to discuss Scouting in the ward and receive assignments from the committee chairperson.
2. Support and assist Scouting activities by providing needed services.
3. See that the Scouting units operate in accordance with Church and BSA policies and standards.

Click here for the current version of the handbook
BSA Leaders Visit Church Sites to Strengthen Relationships

By Nettie H. Francis, LDS-BSA Volunteer

Scouting professionals and volunteers—from 12 councils and 7 states—gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah, September 28th through 30th for the LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar. Held each April and October, the three-day event coincides with the general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The purpose of the seminar is to strengthen LDS-BSA relationships through a deeper understanding of the Church. Invitees include Council Key-3s, LDS-BSA Relationships committee chairmen, and Scouting professionals from many faiths. Participants tour key Church facilities, hear from Church and Scouting leaders, and attend two sessions of general conference.

“Throughout the seminar we strive to give Scouters a vision of why and how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints uses Scouting. We want Church members and those of other faiths alike to understand how Scouting strengthens young men,” explained Mark Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships Director. “There is a tremendous interest in successful LDS-BSA relationships committees and how Scouting functions to support the purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood.”

The opening event was a Thursday evening training session at the Church Office Building with M. Joseph Brough, second counselor in the Young Men General Presidency. His comments were a wonderful introduction to the position and structure of the Church. Watching a clip of The First Vision was a highlight of the evening.

Participants gathered again early Friday morning and traveled to Provo, Utah. Guests who were members of the Church took a special tour of BYU while guests of other faiths were privileged to tour the Missionary Training Center.

President Gilbert of the MTC presidency first explained more about the specific training young missionaries receive before going out into the world. He answered questions about missionaries including where they live in the mission field, if they always travel in pairs, how they are selected to serve, and what their daily activities include. Participants then visited classrooms with missionaries and observed the language training.

“Why did you decide to serve a mission?” “How will you pay for your mission?” “Are you an Eagle Scout?” And many other questions were asked of the missionaries. Several attendees commented that their visit to the MTC was the highlight of their weekend.

Frank Solla from the Greater Wyoming Council shared, “We visited a classroom where the missionaries were learning Spanish. I asked if any of them were Eagle Scouts. Seven of the eight young men were Eagle Scouts. The one who wasn’t was a recent convert to the church and mentioned that he wished he’d had a chance to be a Scout. Of the young sister missionaries, all of them had a brother who was an Eagle, and one sister had five brothers who were all Eagle Scouts!”

Following the Provo events, the entire group returned to the Church’s Humanitarian Center in Salt Lake City for a training session on LDS-BSA relationships with Brother Francis.

“The relationship between the Church and the BSA dates back over 100 years,” taught Brother Francis. “The Church partnership with the BSA was a blessing to the relatively new Scouting organization. In addition, the willingness of the BSA to accept the Church as a chartered partner during a time when there was not a favorable view of the Mormons was also an act of goodwill. Collectively, we have the capacity to solve the toughest problems and find solutions to benefit everyone.”
Participants also had opportunities during the weekend to visit the Family History Library, Church History Museum, and additional venues on Temple Square.

That evening they heard from Sister Joy D. Jones, Primary General President. Sister Jones shared a touching story of a Scoutmaster who blessed the lives of two of her sons, consistently helping them to do “one more thing” or take “one more step” on their journey to Eagle. Sister Jones then asked the group to think of a mentor who had made a difference to them. Her final challenge was to go and “make a difference” for someone, even one person. On Saturday the group attended the morning session of general conference in the Conference Center.

“Sometimes people ask me why attending general conference is so significant to our partnership,” commented Brother Francis during lunch. “But we think about the highest level Church experience we can offer our friends and it’s the chance to hear from our prophet and apostles. Wherever you live across the nation you can now go back and have a conversation with your LDS colleagues and share with them what you experienced here in Salt Lake. That builds relationships.”

Saturday meals included visits and remarks from Young Men general board member Steven Lund. Brother Lund shared several resources with the guests including the For the Strength of Youth pamphlet and the Articles of Faith. After reviewing the articles one by one with the group he concluded, “God is the father of us all. And it makes perfect sense to me that we should be sharing best practices of good will with men of many faiths as we do in Scouting. I’m grateful to be a Boy Scout. I’m grateful for what you do and am grateful to be in such a place with good people.”

First counselor Douglas D. Holmes attended the final Saturday meal and enjoyed visiting with each attendee and then spoke to the group as the meal ended.

“The hope of the rising generation is—I believe—what motivates many of us in Scouting. There is a need for greater civility in this world, and that’s one thing we love about Scouting. We love that community. We love to understand and help others understand us better. The world would be a better place if we all went forward with more understanding.”

“We know that in the Church we are not always the best Scouters,” he continued with a smile. “But we appreciate your patience with us. Hopefully what you have felt this weekend is that what we really strive to be is true followers of Jesus Christ. We’re grateful for the help that Scouting gives us in trying to do that. We appreciate all that you do for the youth of our church and the youth of the nation and the youth of the world.”

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