

BRANCH

G U I D E B O O K

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Distribution

The *Branch Guidebook* is for branch leaders who are new to the Church and have limited Church experience. It will also be useful for leaders in more established areas. It outlines the purpose, organization, and procedures for operating a branch.

Purpose of a Branch



During His mortal ministry, Jesus Christ organized His Church on the earth. After His death, congregations of believers met together to worship; to learn and practice His teachings; and to serve, inspire, and strengthen each other. The Savior promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Today, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are organized into congregations. Small congregations are called branches, and each branch is presided over by a branch president. When approved by the Area Presidency, a mission presi-

dent may organize a branch when at least two member families live in an area and one of the members is a worthy man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood or is a worthy priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. A worthy person is one who has entered into covenants with the Lord, such as the baptismal covenant, and is striving diligently to keep these covenants.

The mission president supervises the branch, and the branch president is accountable to him. When a sufficient number of branches have been organized in a reasonable geographic proximity to each other within a mission, the mission president, with

approval of the Area Presidency, may organize these branches into a district. When the branch is part of an organized district, the branch president is supervised by the district presidency, which, in turn, reports to the mission president.

The Church has prepared this guidebook to help branch leaders learn the responsibilities of their callings and how to fulfill them. All leaders and other Church members are to help accomplish the mission of the Church, which is to invite all people to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32). To accomplish this mission, leaders help members:

- Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Share the gospel by bearing testimony as prompted by the Spirit. Missionaries should continue to help sustain new converts during their transition to Church membership.
- Perfect the Saints. Help new converts progress in the Church by ensuring that they have a friend and

an assignment and are nourished by the word of God. Receive the ordinances and make the covenants of the gospel, strive to keep the commandments as they have promised, serve their fellowmen, care for the poor and needy, and fellowship one another to build the community of Saints.

- Redeem the dead. Identify deceased ancestors and perform temple ordinances for them as far as reasonably possible to prepare for family exaltation.

This guidebook can help branch leaders, individuals, and families learn to live under the influence of the Holy Ghost so the fulfillment of their Church callings is a privilege and a joy. In addition to this guidebook, the scriptures, *Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders' Guidebook* (31178), *Family Guidebook* (31180), *Teaching Guidebook* (34595), *Gospel Principles* (31110), *Gospel Fundamentals* (31129), *Information for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Curriculum* (36363), and other Church publications will be helpful.

Branch Presidency



When organizing a branch, the mission president or the district president with the approval of the mission president, by inspiration from the Lord, calls and sets apart a worthy man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood to be the president of the branch. The mission or district president confers the keys of presidency on the branch president. If no worthy man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood is available, a worthy priest may be called and set apart as branch president.

Until at least two members in the branch hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, the branch president

watches over and strengthens the members, visits their homes often as a home teacher, conducts sacrament meetings, directs branch activities, and completes reports. As more men in the branch receive the priesthood, the mission president may, under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, call two counselors to the branch president and a clerk to help with branch records. The president and his two counselors are the branch presidency.

The branch president is the shepherd of a branch, presiding in love and kindness over all branch members. He sets an example in offering as a sacrifice unto the Lord a “broken

heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20) and testifies of the divinity of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Within the branch, the branch president:

- Is the presiding priesthood leader.
- Is the common judge.
- Directs the care for the poor and needy.
- Takes care of the branch finances and records.

Members of the branch presidency watch over and strengthen branch members, conduct the opening exercises of priesthood meetings, preside over the Aaronic Priesthood, and conduct sacrament meetings.

Presiding Priesthood Leader

As the presiding priesthood leader, the branch president has been given the keys of presidency to administer the Lord’s work in the branch. He presides, watches over, and strengthens all branch members, and teaches them to be accountable in their callings. As the branch grows in membership, counselors in the branch presidency, priesthood quorum leaders, and home teachers assist him. He encourages the elders quorum president to ensure that home teachers are assigned and that each home is visited regularly. Periodic home teaching reports from

the elders quorum president help the branch president be aware of members’ needs.

The branch president oversees the quorums, auxiliaries, and activities in the branch, with emphasis on Aaronic Priesthood young men and on young women of the same age. He is president of the Aaronic Priesthood in the branch. In watching over the young men and young women 12 through 18 years of age in the branch, he interviews them regularly to help them learn and live by gospel precepts and prepare for their future lives. He emphasizes mission preparation and full-time missions for young men and interested young women. He calls young men to lead Aaronic Priesthood quorums. He also calls members to lead branch auxiliaries (Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School). (See *Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders’ Guidebook* for further details



on auxiliaries.) Assisted by his counselors, he calls members to teach classes and serve in other branch positions. He interviews quorum and auxiliary leaders regularly to receive reports on their callings and to counsel with them.

The branch president presides at sacrament meetings, priesthood meetings, and other branch meetings he attends, unless a member of the district or mission presidency, an Area Authority Seventy, or a General Authority is present. The branch president invites these visiting, presiding authorities to sit on the stand. He makes an earnest effort to ensure that all meetings and activities help members come unto Christ.

The branch president directs the performance of most ordinances (see the *Family Guidebook*). He ensures that each person who performs an ordinance has the necessary priesthood authority, is worthy, and follows the proper procedure. He approves ordinations to and advancements in the Aaronic Priesthood. After conferring with the district or mission president, he recommends brethren to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and be ordained to the office of elder. With the mission president's approval, the district president, branch president, or other worthy men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood may confer

the Melchizedek Priesthood and ordain elders.

Common Judge

The branch president is the common judge of branch members. He interviews them to judge their worthiness for temple recommends, ordinations, ordinances, callings, and patriarchal blessings. He may counsel his branch members who seek spiritual guidance.

To help the branch president in his responsibilities as common judge, the Lord promises him the gift of discernment. As he is worthy to receive it, this gift helps him know what is in a person's heart. It helps him know what to say and do to help a person.

When Church members transgress, the branch president can encourage them and help them repent as they confess their sins to him and to the Lord.

If a member commits a serious sin, formal Church discipline, including official probation, disfellowshipment, or excommunication, may be necessary. The branch president reviews the matter with the mission president, who decides whether a disciplinary council is necessary. Under the mission president's direction, a district president or a branch president who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood may preside over a disciplinary council. These councils are conducted in a spirit of love.

They are intended to help a transgressor repent and once again enjoy the full blessings of the gospel.

If the branch president is a priest, he is not authorized to be a common judge. In this situation, the mission president is the common judge of branch members.

Caring for the Poor and Needy

The branch president teaches members to be self-reliant and to contribute fast offerings to help provide for those in need. He has the sacred responsibility of seeking out the worthy poor and needy in the branch and using fast offerings to help care for them. The elders quorum president and the Relief Society president may assist him.

Following Church policies, the branch president determines how fast offerings are used to help care for the poor and needy.

Overseeing Finances and Records

The branch president receives and accounts for tithes and offerings from branch members. He directs the use

and disposition of all branch funds, completes the annual tithing settlement, and makes sure branch records and reports are accurate and current in accordance with Church policies as directed by the district or mission president. Under no condition may any leader ever use local Church funds for personal benefit.

He makes sure the branch gathers monthly fast offerings in an orderly way. When members fast, they should go without food or drink for two consecutive meals and give a fast offering that is at least equal to the value of the food and drink they would have consumed.

Where the branch president is a priest, the mission president oversees the donations and expenditures of the branch.

As soon as practical, the branch president should call and train a clerk who holds the priesthood, pays a full tithe, has a strong testimony of the gospel, and demonstrates a willingness to obey the Lord's commandments. The branch president ensures that the clerk follows Church policy on handling Church funds.

Interviewing



An interview is a meeting between a leader and one other person. In an interview, the leader asks questions, listens, teaches, and gives counsel to the other person. Interviews provide an opportunity for sharing information or reporting on one's assignment or calling. They also provide an opportunity for giving instructions and counsel. An interview is a good time for a leader to teach members the doctrines, principles, and practices of the Church, drawing upon the scriptures and teachings of the latter-day prophets.

The branch president interviews children approaching eight years of age to determine their preparedness to be

baptized and confirmed members of the Church when at least one parent is a member of the Church and both parents consent to the baptism. (Missionary leaders interview baptismal candidates who are nine or older and eight-year-old children whose parents are both nonmembers to determine the candidates' worthiness for baptism and confirmation.) The branch president interviews branch members to determine worthiness to receive the priesthood, be advanced in the priesthood, or serve in a Church calling. The branch president and mission president interview branch members to determine worthiness to receive a temple recommend.

The following suggestions will help leaders make interviews more useful and productive.

1. Choose a quiet place where the interview will not be interrupted.
2. Inform the person why he or she is being interviewed.
3. Ask questions in a loving, direct way.
4. Let the person ask questions and express feelings.
5. Listen to what the person says.
6. Give counsel, instructions, and assignments clearly.

7. Thank and encourage the person and, as impressed by the Spirit, bear testimony, read passages of scripture, and pray together. Help the person leave feeling strengthened and hopeful.
8. Allow enough time for the interview so the person does not feel rushed.

When interviewing a woman, the branch president should ask a man who holds the priesthood to be in an adjoining room, foyer, or hall, where possible.

Calling Members to Serve in Church Positions



When calling members to serve in Church positions, priesthood leaders should interview each person privately to learn whether the person is worthy to serve; whether the person has the ability, desire, and time to do the work of the calling; and whether the person's family situation will allow him or her to serve.

If the leader feels, through inspiration, that the person is right for the position, he asks the person to accept the calling, making clear that it comes from the Lord. He explains plainly

the duties and blessings of the calling and informs the person that he or she will be released after an appropriate time of service.

Before calling a married woman to a position, a leader should confer with her husband and ensure that he will support her. When calling a man to a position, a leader should ensure that the man's wife will support him. A leader should confer with the parents before calling a child or youth to serve in a Church position.

Sustaining and Releasing



When members have accepted callings or are going to be ordained to Aaronic Priesthood offices, a member of the branch presidency should have them sustained in a Church meeting by those they will serve. To do this, the presiding or conducting officer presents the names (in a sacrament meeting for branch callings or in a class or quorum for class or quorum officers) and asks the newly called members to stand while the congregation, class, or quorum sustains them. The person who presents the names of those to be sustained may say:

“We have called [say the person’s name] to serve as [state the position

to which the person has been called] and propose that he [or she] be sustained in that calling. Those in favor may show it by the uplifted hand. [Wait for those in favor to raise their hands.] Those opposed, if any, may show it by the uplifted hand. [Wait for a moment for those opposed to raise their hands.]”

A member of the branch presidency may confer in private with any who are opposed. The members being sustained should raise their hands in favor of being sustained. If the names of two or more members are being presented, they may be sustained as a group.

When releasing members from Church positions, a priesthood leader interviews them, thanks them sincerely for their service, and explains that the time has come for their release. In sacrament meeting, the presiding or conducting officer announces releases from branch positions. When members

are released from class or quorum positions, the presiding or conducting officer announces the releases in a class or quorum meeting. In announcing releases, leaders ask members to show their appreciation by the uplifted hand for the service of each member being released.

Setting Apart Members to Callings



Members called to Church positions should be set apart before they begin serving (see D&C 42:11). Under the direction of the presiding authority, one or more men who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, including a worthy father or husband, may participate in a setting apart. They place their hands lightly on the person's head. The one who speaks:

1. Calls the person by his or her full name.
2. States that he is setting the person apart by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood.
3. Sets the person apart to the position to which he or she has been called.
4. Gives a blessing as the Spirit directs.
5. Closes in the name of Jesus Christ.

When setting apart a president of an elders, teachers, or deacons quorum, the mission or branch president confers the keys of presidency of that quorum upon the person being set apart.

Ordinances and Blessings



Priesthood ordinances are sacred acts given by the Lord and performed by the authority of the priesthood. Priesthood blessings are given by the authority of the priesthood for healing, comfort, and encouragement. Brethren who perform ordinances and blessings are to prepare themselves by living according to gospel principles and striving to be guided by the Holy Spirit. They perform each ordinance and blessing in a dignified manner. Each ordinance and blessing should be performed:

1. In the name of Jesus Christ.
2. By the authority of the priesthood.

3. With any necessary procedures, such as specified words or consecrated oil.
4. Where required, ordinances must be authorized by the designated priesthood leader who holds the proper keys. *Ordinances that require priesthood leader authorization are naming and blessing children, performing baptisms and confirmations, conferring the priesthood and ordaining to a priesthood office, blessing and passing the sacrament, and dedicating graves.*

See the *Family Guidebook* for instruction on specific ordinances and blessings.

Member Responsibilities



Church leaders invite all Church members, wherever they live, to support the mission of the Church by fulfilling basic responsibilities, including (1) sharing the gospel by bearing testimony as prompted by the Spirit; (2) helping individuals and families perfect themselves in their journeys toward immortality and eternal life by striving to keep the commandments, serve their

fellowmen, and receive the ordinances and covenants of the gospel; and (3) helping individuals and families in their search for deceased ancestors and encouraging them to receive temple ordinances. All Church members support the mission of the Church by fulfilling these responsibilities. For more information on these responsibilities, see the *Family Guidebook*.

Meetings



Branches where the branch president is the only one who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood or who is a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood hold sacrament meeting and a Sunday gospel instruction meeting for members.

Branches that have an organized elders quorum hold the following meetings in addition to those mentioned in the preceding paragraph:

1. Priesthood meeting
2. Sunday meeting for women, young women, and children
3. Priesthood executive committee meeting

4. Branch council meeting

Where the number of members is sufficient and where leaders and meeting places are available, a branch can discontinue the Sunday meeting for women, young women, and children and can hold the following meetings in addition to those listed in the preceding paragraph:

1. Relief Society
2. Aaronic Priesthood (Young Men)
3. Primary
4. Sunday School
5. Young Women

6. Mutual, where young men of Aaronic Priesthood age and Young Women of the same age meet separately or together on a weekday evening or Saturday for youth activities and instruction under the direction and supervision of the branch presidency

Options for Sunday Meeting Schedules

Information for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Curriculum shows options for Sunday meeting schedules.

Family Home Evening

Each family holds a family home evening in their own home at least once each week (see the *Family Guidebook*).

Sacrament Meeting

The branch president presides at sacrament meeting, during which worthy brethren who hold the appropriate priesthood bless and pass the sacrament. A member of the branch presidency conducts the meeting and endeavors to see that it starts on time. A sample agenda follows:

1. Welcome and setting of spiritual tone
2. Brief announcements

3. Opening hymn and prayer

4. Branch business

5. Sacrament hymn and administration of the sacrament

6. Speakers on gospel subjects based on the scriptures and the teachings of latter-day apostles and prophets

7. Between speakers, a congregational or branch choir number, usually a hymn from the hymnbook (optional)

8. Closing hymn and prayer

Once each month, usually on the first Sunday, sacrament meeting is also a fast and testimony meeting. Members are invited to come in an attitude of fasting and prayer after abstaining from food and drink for two meals if their health permits.

After the sacrament is blessed and passed, the member of the branch presidency conducting the fast and testimony meeting bears his testimony of Jesus Christ and the gospel and invites other members to bear their testimonies for the remainder of the meeting. The meeting ends with a hymn and prayer. The sacrament is blessed and passed during each sacrament meeting (see “Ordinances and Blessings” in this guidebook).



Priesthood Meeting

Priesthood meeting is held before or after sacrament meeting. A member of the branch presidency conducts opening exercises. A sample agenda follows:

1. Welcome and setting of spiritual tone
2. Brief announcements and business
3. Opening hymn and prayer
4. Separation to quorums for business and instruction
5. Closing prayer in the quorums

Following the opening exercises, all adult men (19 and older) meet in the

elders quorum meeting, presided over by the elders quorum president.

All young men (12 through 18) meet in the Aaronic Priesthood quorum meeting, which is presided over by the branch president. When meeting rooms and numbers of members are limited, Aaronic Priesthood young men may meet with the Melchizedek Priesthood brethren. However, when the number of young men is sufficient, and enough adult leadership and meeting rooms are available, the deacons, teachers, and priests meet in their separate quorums. (See the *Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders' Guidebook*.)

Sunday Meeting for Women, Young Women, and Children

In small branches with too few sisters and children to organize and meet as separate auxiliaries, the Relief Society president conducts the opening exercises. The meeting may include:

1. Welcome and setting of spiritual tone
2. Brief announcements and business
3. An opening hymn and prayer
4. Hymns and children's songs
5. Instruction by the Relief Society president or separation to classes
6. Closing prayer

When space is not available for separate opening exercises in small branches, the men, women, and children meet together for combined opening exercises conducted by the branch president.

As the branch grows, young women (ages 12 through 18) may meet with the Relief Society while children (ages 3 through 11) meet under the direction of a sister appointed by the branch president.

When Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School are organized in a branch, Relief Society

and Young Women meet separately on Sunday during the same time as priesthood meeting. Sunday School meets after priesthood meeting. Primary is held during the same time as priesthood, Relief Society, Young Women, and Sunday School meetings. Primary opening exercises and sharing time are conducted during half of the time, and class instruction is conducted during the other half. In auxiliary meetings, members pray, sing hymns, teach, and learn the gospel using materials specified in *Information for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Curriculum*.

Priesthood Executive Committee Meeting

The branch presidency, clerk, executive secretary, elders quorum president, branch Young Men president, and branch mission leader (when called) comprise the branch priesthood executive committee. This committee meets as often as needed to coordinate branch activities, programs, and services to ensure that they strengthen families and individuals and meet members' needs. The branch president presides. The committee discusses and coordinates such priesthood responsibilities as home teaching, missionary work, and temple and family history work.



Branch Council Meeting

The branch presidency, clerk, executive secretary, elders quorum president, branch Young Men president, and branch mission leader (when called); presidents of the Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School; and the branch teacher improvement coordinator meet as the branch council. In these meetings the council seeks to strengthen individuals and families spiritually; assist them in preparing to receive temple ordinances; improve

the retention of new converts; teach principles of caring for the poor; correlate branch programs, activities, and services; and solve problems in the branch. The Relief Society president discusses the needs of the women, young women, and children in the branch when Young Women and Primary presidents have not been called. The branch president invites ideas and suggestions and helps others participate fully in the discussions, decisions, and plans. He considers their suggestions carefully in making plans and giving assignments.

Meeting Places



Family home evenings are held in members' homes. All other branch meetings are held in a home, a rented building, or a Church-owned building. The mission presidency can provide information on obtaining and

maintaining a meeting place for the branch. These leaders also can provide information on renting a meeting place and on qualifications for building a Church-owned building.

Resource Materials



The Church publishes resource materials to help members learn and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. These materials include the scriptures, lesson manuals, the *Liahona*, gospel art, and guidebooks. Church materials are based on the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets. Materials for a branch consist of *basic* or *general* curriculum materials or a combination of the two (see *Information for Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders on Curriculum*). Where the *Liahona* is available, each family in the branch should subscribe. Each year the area office or distribution center sends to the branch lesson

manuals, other resource materials, and information about ordering additional copies or other approved materials.

Branch leaders are to keep resource materials in the building where branch meetings are held or in a member's home. Leaders should inform members that the materials are available and should encourage their use for preparing lessons and talks and for personal study. Teachers may be given class or quorum manuals, but they should be encouraged to return them to the branch or ward upon their release as teachers.

Activities



Under the direction of branch leaders, the branch plans and carries out activities that meet the needs of members. However, branch activities should not compete with family activities or disrupt family life. All activities should be inexpensive to avoid excluding any because of cost. Any expenditure of

funds requires prior approval by the branch presidency. Activities planned for Sunday should be appropriate for the Sabbath day. No activities are to be planned for Monday evenings because they are reserved for family home evening.

Music



Hymns of the Church and other suitable music, whether played or sung, are important in Church meetings, in homes, and in personal lives. Appropriate music is found in *Gospel Principles*, *Hymns*, the *Children's*

Songbook, and *Hymns and Children's Songs*, which are available in some languages. Music training and keyboards may be available for those serving or who may serve in future music callings.

Records and Reports

The Lord commanded the Church to keep records. Four types of records, designed to help leaders support members and for which forms are provided, are:

- Financial records (member contributions and monthly financial report).
- Member progress reports (member attendance and priesthood office of new converts).
- Membership records (member information, including ordinances).
- Historical records (sustaining of officers and record of activities).

In keeping these records and preparing these reports, the branch president should follow the instructions of the mission president. He may call a branch clerk to help keep records.

Under the direction of the mission president, branch leaders are taught the importance and use of records and reports and are to record important branch or ward historical events. Confidential information on Church records should be guarded carefully by those who handle these sacred records.

Finances



The Lord gives every member of the Church the opportunity to receive rich blessings by paying tithes and offerings and by making other donations. Members pay one-tenth of their income as tithing. In addition, they are invited to fast for two meals once each month on fast Sunday and give at least the value of these meals to the Church for the care of the poor and the needy of the branch. Also,

members are invited to donate funds to the Church for missionary work, building temples, and other Church efforts.

Where possible, two brethren who hold the priesthood should open the envelopes containing tithing, offerings, and other donations, should complete receipts, and should deposit the money or care for it as directed by the mission president.

Leadership Training



Mission priesthood leaders teach branch priesthood leaders how to lead the branch, fulfill basic priesthood responsibilities, and help members use the priesthood in their lives. Mission priesthood leaders also provide guidance for branch auxiliary leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Mission priesthood leaders see that each branch has the materials needed for the branch to operate successfully as a unit of the Church.

For additional information about leadership, see the *Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders' Guidebook*.

Obtaining Church Materials and Locating Information on Family History

Local leaders and other members may obtain Church materials, including scriptures, courses of study, Church magazines, garments, and temple clothing, from their Church distribution center or service center, from the Salt Lake Distribution Center, or through the Church's official Internet site, which is located at www.lds.org.

Information on family history work is available on the Church's family history Internet site, which is located at www.familysearch.org.

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

