
BISHOP H. DAVID BURTON

Presiding Bishop

The Welfare Responsibilities of the Bishop



SEEKING OUT AND CARING FOR THE NEEDY

Hello, I am Bishop David Burton, and today I have the privilege of being with six marvelous bishops from the Centerville Utah North Stake. We are at Welfare Square in Salt Lake City. Thank

you for joining us as we discuss the responsibilities of bishops in seeking out and caring for those who may not be self-reliant.

As we begin, I am reminded of two quotations from President J. Reuben Clark Jr. President Clark served for many years in the First Presidency of the Church and was very instrumental in the development of what was then called the Church Security Plan and is now referred to as the Church welfare plan.

On one occasion, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. telephoned a bishop to tell him that a single mother with three little children had, that very day, moved into the bishop's ward. President Clark asked the bishop to go as quickly as possible to her new residence and do what he could to help her.

President Clark told the bishop, "If I could, I would help this sister, but I am only the First Counselor to the President of the Church and do not have authority to write a bishop's order on the storehouse. You have

that right," he said, "and the privilege, and for that reason I am calling you, requesting you to do what you feel should be done in her case."

On another occasion, President Clark, while giving a very powerful address, said:

"By the word of the Lord the sole mandate to care for and the sole discretion in caring for, the poor of the Church is lodged [with] the bishops. . . . It is his duty and his only to determine to whom, when, how, and how much shall be given to any member of his ward from Church funds. . . .

"This is his high and solemn obligation imposed by the Lord Himself. The bishop cannot escape his duty; he cannot shirk it; he cannot pass it on to someone else, and so relieve himself. Whatever help he calls in, he is still responsible" (quoted in Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 132; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 90).

What are the bishop's welfare-related responsibilities? They are at least threefold! They include:

1. Teaching members the basic principles of self-reliance and encouraging them to become self-reliant. The two recently published booklets, *All Is Safely Gathered In: Family Finances* and *All Is Safely Gathered In: Family Home Storage* can be very helpful in helping members understand the importance of self-reliance..
2. Helping ward council members know and act upon their responsibilities.
3. Providing assistance according to basic welfare principles.

The newly published booklet entitled *Providing in the Lord's Way: Summary of a Leader's Guide to Welfare* will remind you of the basic objective of welfare, self-reliance, and supporting principles.

THE LORD'S STOREHOUSE

The Lord has revealed that members of the Church should "impart of [their] substance unto the poor, . . . and they shall be laid before the bishop . . . [and] kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy" (D&C 42:31–32, 34).

Each bishop has a variety of “tools” laid before him to assist in helping the poor. We call this collection of tools the Lord’s storehouse.

The storehouse includes:

1. Cash contributed as members live and receive the blessings of participating in the fast.
2. Commodities produced internally or purchased for use by the bishops.
3. The time, talents, and resources of members.

These talents, as may be helpful and required, along with the cash and commodities, constitute the Lord’s storehouse. The Lord’s storehouse is available to every bishop and exists in every ward. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Lord’s storehouse is not limited to a building or a warehouse filled with commodities awaiting distribution.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

As bishops carry out their divine mandate to seek out and care for the poor in the Lord’s way, they will often be required to make difficult decisions. Bishops are blessed with and very much entitled to the gift of discernment as they are faced with this task. Each individual case that you deal with requires inspiration. Guided by the Spirit, while keeping in mind basic welfare principles, bishops can best determine who is in need, how much and what kind of assistance is needed, and how long it may be required.

You may ask, what are some of these basic, time-tested welfare principles that will help bishops optimize their decisions?

1. Seek out the poor.

Bishops should keep in mind that it is their responsibility to seek out the poor. It is not enough to assist only when asked. The bishop should encourage priesthood and Relief Society leaders, along with home teachers and visiting teachers, to help identify those who need assistance.

2. Promote personal responsibility.

Bishops have the responsibility to keep in mind, as they assist individuals, that they must promote personal responsibility. Individuals are responsible

for themselves. When individuals are not capable of providing for themselves, immediate family, as well as extended family, have an obligation and opportunity to assist.

3. Sustain life not lifestyle.

We use the little phrase, “sustain life but not lifestyle.” As we sustain life, Church assistance is designed to furnish food, clothing, and appropriate shelter as well as other assistance, as determined by the bishop, needed to help the individual become self-reliant. Individuals are expected to use any assets they have for their support and in an orderly way downsize to accommodate their budget restraints.

4. Provide commodities before cash.

Another basic principle that we generally use is to provide commodities before we provide cash. When possible, the bishop provides members with commodities instead of giving them money or paying their bills. Where bishops’ storehouses are not available, fast offerings may be used to buy needed commodities.

5. Provide work and service opportunities.

One of the most important basic principles includes providing work and service opportunities. For individuals to retain their dignity during a time of personal distress, opportunities for service and work commensurate with the recipients’ circumstances should be found. The value of the work or service need not be equal to the assistance received but rather sufficient to avoid the evils of the dole and the fostering of an entitlement mentality. The ward council can assist by compiling and maintaining a list of meaningful work opportunities.

QUESTIONS FROM BISHOPS

With this short background presentation, let’s discuss some issues you would like to raise as they relate to your important stewardship of looking after and seeking out the poor.

Question: Recognizing that we, as bishops, have specific responsibilities for welfare assistance, are there

others to whom we may appropriately turn for help in that responsibility?

Response: The bishop has the opportunity to use a number of others in assisting in this responsibility. Particularly, members of the ward council, priesthood quorums, and the Relief Society all can help the bishop meet members' temporary and long-term welfare needs. These leaders are assisted by home teachers, visiting teachers, and others who have special skills.

Question: In regard to these welfare matters, how can I, as a bishop, better utilize my Relief Society and quorum leaders?

Response: Relief Society and quorum leaders can be extremely helpful in this whole process, and welfare should be central to the role of priesthood quorums and also the Relief Society. It should be a regularly discussed item in presidency meetings. Under the direction of the bishop, priesthood quorums and the Relief Society should help members find solutions to both short-term and long-term welfare needs and become self-reliant.

The Relief Society president holds a special place in this process. Normally, she assists the bishop by visiting members who need welfare assistance. She helps them assess their needs and suggests to the bishop what assistance to provide. The bishop and the Relief Society president may use the Needs and Resources Analysis form to assist them in determining those needs.

Question: Bishop Burton, how would you recommend that we teach the law of the fast so as to bring greater understanding to our members?

Response: The law of the fast is basic to the spiritual welfare of our Father in Heaven's children. He has established the law of the fast, and the law of tithing as well, to bless His people. The bishop should teach all members the importance of living these laws. He should also teach about the blessings the Lord promises for living these laws. These blessings include a closeness to the Lord, increased spiritual strength, temporal well-being, greater compassion, and a stronger desire to serve.

In some areas of the world, bishops' storehouses are available to help provide food and clothing. Where a bishops' storehouse is not available, fast offerings are used to provide food and clothing. They are also used to pay for shelter, medical assistance, and other life-sustaining aid.

There is no requirement, however, that fast-offering expenditures within the ward and stake remain in balance with fast-offering contributions.

Question: With the economy in the state that it is currently in, we are seeing an increased number of families and members struggling to meet mortgage payments. Is it permissible for us to use funds to assist with their mortgage payments?

Response: As you undoubtedly remember, welfare assistance is usually designed to be temporary. Bishops, along with quorum and Relief Society leaders, and other specialists if needed, should help recipients design a plan to become self-reliant so they will no longer need welfare assistance.

If a payment of a mortgage in the short run will enable them to carry out their plan to become self-reliant, then payment of a mortgage could be very desirable and permissible.

Question: Is it appropriate if an individual is receiving governmental welfare assistance to use Church welfare assistance as well?

Response: Members may choose to use resources in the community, including government resources, to meet their basic needs. The bishop should become familiar with these resources. Resources that are often used include:

- Hospitals, physicians, or other sources of medical aid.
- Job training and placement services, where available in the community.
- Help for people with disabilities.
- Professional counselors or social workers. Most every community has counselors or social workers who share our values.
- Addiction-recovery resources, which are more broadly available than ever before.

When Church members receive assistance from non-Church sources, the bishop may also give Church assistance and should help members avoid becoming dependent in any way on these sources. Where possible, members should work in return for assistance received. We need to avoid the evils of the dole and the feeling of having some kind of entitlement.

Brothers and sisters, we have had the opportunity for just a few moments to discuss sacred principles relating to helping and assisting those who are in need. May the Lord bless each of you as you perform your role in reaching out to our Father in Heaven's children and displaying the capacity to love and the compassion that comes from service. I humbly pray the Lord's blessings to be upon you, and I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.