

FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS: THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY HISTORY PROGRAM

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“If temple ordinances are an essential part of the restored gospel, and I testify that they are, then we must provide the means by which they can be accomplished. All of our vast family history endeavor is directed to temple work. There is no other purpose for it. The temple ordinances become the crowning blessings the Church has to offer.” – Gordon B. Hinckley, “New Temples to Provide ‘Crowning Blessings’ of the Gospel,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.

“Family history work of Church members has a refining, spiritualizing, tempering influence on those who are engaged in it. They understand that they are tying their family together, their living family here with those who have gone before.” Boyd K. Packer, “Your Family History: Getting Started,” *Ensign*, Aug 2003, 17.

OVERVIEW OF TEMPLE AND FAMILY HISTORY WORK IN STAKES AND WARDS

The family history organization in stakes and wards exists to help members identify their ancestors, link them into families, and provide temple ordinances for them. Under the direction of the stake presidency, the high council adviser with responsibility for temple and family history work oversees this work in the stake. Under the direction of the bishopric, the high priests group leader (or a member of the elders quorum presidency where there is no high priests group leader) is the priesthood leader with direct responsibility for coordinating temple and family history work in the ward.

The high priests group leader recommends and the bishopric calls and sets apart members to be called as family history consultants. The high priests group leader ensures that enough family history consultants are called to meet the needs of the ward, including those needed to fulfill the ward’s assignment to support a family history center. The high priests group leader supervises family history consultants.

The high priests group leader, as part of his responsibility for temple and family history work in the ward, coordinates with the priesthood executive committee and ward council to identify individuals and families with whom family history consultants could work individually.

FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS--THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL FAMILY HISTORY PROGRAMS

The *Church Handbook of Instructions* describes the essential role of family history consultants in the basic family history program of the Church: “The key to a successful family history program is family history consultants who meet with members and families individually to help them begin and continue their temple and family history work” (*Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders*, 264).

The calling of brothers and sisters as family history consultants is essential to the success of temple and family history activities. New emphasis is placed on encouraging family history consultants to reach out to every individual and family in the ward, a few families at a time, to help them begin or expand their temple and family history efforts.

The scope of the family history consultant calling has been expanded to include serving in a family history center and, if assigned, providing training to those with family history callings.

FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Family history consultants help members individually as they begin or expand their family history efforts and provide ordinances for ancestors. Consultants are members' principal source for family history help. They help members find answers to their family history questions.

Primary Responsibilities

Family history consultants have three principal responsibilities:

1. Reach out to members of the ward a few at a time, and provide them individual family history help. Over time, all members of the ward can receive help.
2. Focus on individuals and families suggested by the priesthood executive committee and ward council.
3. Help new members identify ancestors and go to the temple to be baptized and confirmed for their ancestors.

1. Reach Out to Members

Consultants reach out to all the members in the ward. Their objective is to contact every member of the ward, so that over time all members of the ward can receive family history help.

Consultants should not wait for members to contact them. They should be proactive in reaching out to members. Some members may be hesitant to approach consultants themselves to ask for help. Members will usually respond positively to a personal invitation from a family history consultant to help them get started or continue their family history efforts.

2. Focus Efforts

As consultants reach out to members, they focus particularly on individuals and families suggested by the priesthood executive committee and ward council.

The high priests group leader may provide consultants with the names of individuals and families to contact. He coordinates with the priesthood executive committee and ward council to identify individuals and families with whom consultants could work. These may be members whom these leaders feel could be particularly blessed or strengthened by participating in temple and family history work.

Consultants contact these individuals and families as soon as possible. They report to the high priests group leader on their success in contacting these members and the help they have provided.

3. Help New Members

Consultants meet with new members of the Church soon after their baptism to introduce them to the principles of family history and temple work. Consultants help these new members identify ancestors and go to the temple to be baptized and confirmed for them.

New members who have experienced the Spirit when they were baptized usually are excited to provide the same opportunity for their ancestors. Having the opportunity to go to the temple and receive ordinances for their ancestors can bring great strength to new members.

Additional Opportunities to Serve

In addition to their primary responsibilities, consultants may have additional opportunities to serve:

Serve in a Family History Center

Family history centers provide access to family history resources that members and community patrons can use to expand their family history work. Members and family history consultants can use the center's Internet connection to access FamilySearch.org and other Church online family history resources. Family history centers can provide training to family history consultants in how to use family history resources.

Family history centers are staffed by family history consultants assigned from the stake or stakes in which centers exist. The high council adviser makes assignments to wards to provide family history consultants to staff each family history center in the stake. Consultants are assigned by the bishopric or high priests group leader to serve in a family history center. Members of the community may serve as volunteers in family history centers.

Ideally, consultants work directly with members in their homes and also serve in a family history center so they can become familiar with all the resources available to members. Where there is no center near consultants, they may work directly with members. In some cases, consultants might be assigned to serve specifically in a family history center.

Teach Family History Classes

When assigned by the bishopric, consultants teach family history classes during Sunday School and other times to meet the needs of members. They use *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work* (34697) as the basic curriculum. Other resources may be used to supplement (see "Selected Resources for Family History Consultants" below).

The class could last from six to eight weeks, depending on the needs of the class. Where possible, the class can be taught in a room where FamilySearch.org is available, such as a family history center. Classes are most effective when class participants are able to do family history work as part of the class experience.

Provide Family History Training

One or more family history consultants may be assigned by the high council adviser through the bishopric or high priests group leader to provide family history training. These consultants may be assigned to train family history consultants and other members with family history callings.

Assist Missionaries. The Church handbook for missionary work, *Preach My Gospel* (36617), discusses how missionaries can use family history as an approach to interest members of the community to learn more about the Church (see pages 163-165). Family history consultants may be asked by their priesthood leaders to help missionaries in these efforts.

HELP MEMBERS

Family history consultants should actively reach out to members in the ward so they can provide them family history help. When they contact members, they should introduce themselves as a family history consultant. They should set an appointment to visit with members in their homes to assess where they are in their family history and how they can help. Consultants use *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work* as a resource to help members.

Meet with Church Members in Their Homes

Where possible, consultants should visit with members in their homes. Consultants can provide members individual help in their homes. Members usually will have information available in their homes to help them get started.

When meeting with members in their homes, consultants should exercise appropriate caution. They should go with a companion such as another consultant or a spouse when needed. They should not go where they do not feel comfortable. If needed, they should consult with their high priests group leader for guidance.

Encourage Members

Members often need encouragement to begin or continue their family history. Consultants should be positive and supportive. They should help members step-by-step, at a pace that is comfortable for them. Consultants should prayerfully consider members' needs and how they might help. Most members can be successful in doing family history if they receive individual help.

Help Members Meet Their Family History Needs

Members have a variety of experience with family history and have different family history needs. For example, they may be:

- New, enthusiastic converts.
- Life-long members who have assumed that their family history is already done.
- Young families busy with their employment, raising their children, and fulfilling their Church callings.
- Members who have done some family history in the past.
- Members who want to get started so they can provide ordinances for their ancestors.
- Members who want to share their family history heritage with their children and others.
- Mature members with stacks of old genealogical forms in a box or a closet.

The Spirit is essential in the work of family history consultants. Consultants should pray for the Spirit to guide them. They should pray for inspiration and discernment to understand members' family history needs and how they can help.

Ask Questions to Understand How to Help

Consultants ask questions so they can assess where members are in their family history efforts and how they can help. For example, they might ask questions such as:

- How can I help you?
- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- What family history work have you done before?
- What experience have you had using FamilySearch?

Basic Approach to Helping Members

As a basic approach with members who are beginning their family history, consultants help members:

- Understand the doctrines and purpose of temple and family history work.
- Identify what information is needed to provide ordinances for ancestors.
- Gather information they may have in their homes.
- Gather information from relatives.
- Organize the information they gather.
- Use FamilySearch resources to:
 - See what family history information the Church already has about their ancestors.
 - Determine what ordinances have already been performed for their ancestors.
 - Provide needed ordinances for their ancestors that are ready to be performed.
 - Preserve and share family history information.

Helping Members Who Have Already Done Some Family History Work

Some members may already have done family history work. They may need help finding some specific information needed to provide additional ordinances, or help extending their family history beyond the first few generations. As needed, consultants can go with these members to a family history center to obtain help using family history resources available in centers.

Helping New Members

Consultants should do as much as possible to help new members get started, so they can go to the temple soon after their own baptism to be baptized and confirmed for deceased ancestors.

Consultants:

- Give new members a brief introduction to the doctrines of temple and family history work. This should be a very basic overview that does not overwhelm new members.
- Use FamilySearch resources to identify new members' deceased ancestors who need ordinances and to prepare a temple submission.
- Report to the high priests group leader on their progress in helping new members identify deceased ancestors who need ordinances and prepare the names of these ancestors to take to the temple. The high priests group leader coordinates with the bishop to ensure that new members meet with him so they can obtain a limited-use temple recommend.
- Accompany new members when they go to the temple to be baptized and confirmed for their ancestors.

Consultants can then help new members learn to use FamilySearch resources themselves to continue their temple and family history work.

HELP FOR FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS

Family history consultants have resources available to help them fulfill their calling.

Help from Priesthood Leaders

Priesthood leaders teach members the doctrines of temple and family history work. They provide consultants direction and leadership. Family history consultants should seek direction and counsel from the high priests group leader.

Reporting. In priesthood executive committee and ward council meetings, the high priests group leader reports on temple and family history, including reports on the individual help family history consultants have provided members.

Consultants should provide the high priests group leader a monthly report of their service. This will help him provide a report in priesthood executive committee and ward council meetings on family history work in the ward. It will also help create a regular opportunity for the high priests group leader and consultants to counsel together. For example, a family history consultant could report on:

- Members the consultant has reached out to during the month, including those suggested by the priesthood executive committee and ward council.
- The help the consultant is providing to members.

Local Consultants and Family History Centers

In some stakes, a family history consultant is assigned to provide training to those with family history callings. Consultants could receive training from other consultants in the ward. They may also receive training in a family history center. When consultants need help answering members' family history questions, they can obtain help from other consultants or from a family history center in the stake.

Help from the Family and Church History Department

The Family and Church History Department provides training and support for family history consultants.

Online Training. The Family and Church History Department has created online training courses for family history consultants. Consultants can access these courses wherever and whenever they can use the Internet. Consultants can go through the courses as often as they wish, at their own pace.

To access the courses, all consultants should register at: <http://consultant.familysearch.org>

Soon after they register, consultants will begin to receive weekly memos and updates on family history issues. In few weeks, they will be notified of their account on the Church's Internet Learning System. They will then be able to access the courses.

Area Support. Area Support missionaries and staff help family history consultants answer members' family history questions. Consultants can contact Area Support when they need help. Area Support missionaries and staff are located worldwide. Area Support uses an online Family History Support System to track questions and search a knowledge database to find answers to family history questions.

Consultants can contact Area Support at:

- 1-866-406-1830 (North America)

- familyhistory@support.familysearch.org
- FamilySearch by clicking **Product Support**, and then clicking **Ask a Question**. Then send an e-mail to a support representative.

Headquarters Support. When a consultant asks Area Support a question that requires technical expertise, Area Support forwards the question to Headquarters Support. Technical staff find the solution and provide the answer.

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR FAMILY HISTORY CONSULTANTS

The following resources can help you in your calling as a family history consultant. The numbers listed in parentheses after the titles listed below are Salt Lake Distribution Services item numbers. Contact Distribution Services in North America at 1-800-537-5971. For online ordering, see www.ldscatalog.com

Church online resources:

- FamilySearch on the Internet. FamilySearch includes access to Research Helps, Research Guidance, the Family History Library Catalog, and support help. See www.familysearch.org

Church print and other resources:

- Section 9 of the *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 2: Priesthood and Auxiliary Leaders* (35709).
- *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work* (34697).
- *How Do I Start My Family History?* (32916).
- *A Guide to Research* (30971).
- *Introduction to Family History Teacher Manual* (35132).
- *Temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (35863).
- *Training for Family History Leaders DVD* (00410090).

Talks and articles by general Church leaders. For example, see:

- Henry B. Eyring, "Hearts Bound Together," *Ensign*, May 2005, 77.
- James E. Faust, "The Phenomenon That Is You," *Ensign*, Nov 2003, 53.
- Boyd K. Packer, "Your Family History: Getting Started," *Ensign*, Aug 2003, 12.
- Dennis B. Neuenschwander, "Bridges and Eternal Keepsakes," *Ensign*, May 1999, 83.
- Dallin H. Oaks, "Family History: 'In Wisdom and Order,'" *Ensign*, June 1989, 6.

Other online resources:

- "Religion 261 Introduction to Family History" lessons online at <http://261.byu.edu>
- Center for Family History and Genealogy Web site at <http://familyhistory.byu.edu>
- Brigham Young University, Department of Independent Studies, offers two free online courses, "Finding Your Ancestors," and "Providing Temple Ordinances for Your Ancestors," at <http://ce.byu.edu/is/genealogy>