

31.

Interviews and Counseling

31.1

Interviews

Each stake president and bishop is “a judge in Israel” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:72). By this authority he conducts worthiness interviews and priesthood interviews. He represents the Lord in conducting these interviews. Accordingly, he should seek to bless members and help them live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

31.1.1

General Instructions for Worthiness Interviews

Stake presidents, bishops, and (when authorized) their counselors conduct worthiness interviews as outlined in this section. They should prepare spiritually so they can be guided by the Spirit during these interviews. They should also seek the power of discernment. This is a spiritual gift that will help them discern truth, as well as a member’s needs (see Doctrine and Covenants 46:27–28).

Worthiness interviews should be private. However, the person being interviewed may invite another adult to be present.

Careful listening is important during worthiness interviews. The member of the stake presidency or bishopric should give full and sincere attention to the person being interviewed. The interviewer also makes sure the member understands the questions being asked. He sets aside enough time to conduct the interview in a dignified, unhurried manner.

31.1.2

General Instructions for Priesthood Interviews

Stake presidents, bishops, and their counselors regularly interview the priesthood leaders who report to them. One purpose of these interviews is to receive an accounting of the leader’s responsibilities. Another purpose is to help the leader set goals and make plans to accomplish them. Where applicable, budgets and expenditures are also reviewed during these interviews.

The person who conducts a priesthood interview should instruct, encourage, and inspire leaders in their efforts to fulfill their callings. He should also express gratitude and strengthen the leader in his personal and family life.

31.1.3

Interviews Conducted by the Stake President

The stake president conducts the following interviews with stake members:

- For temple recommends for those who are receiving their own endowment or are being married or sealed in a temple (see 26.3.1).
- For recommendation of full-time missionaries (see 24.4.2).
- For release of full-time missionaries after they have returned home (see 24.8.2).
- For callings to serve as counselors in the stake presidency, as patriarchs, and as bishops, when authorized.
- For callings to serve as elders quorum presidents, the stake Relief Society president, and stake clerks.
- For helping members repent of serious sins (see chapter 32).

The stake president also interviews each bishop regularly to encourage and instruct him. He interviews the stake patriarch at least twice a year (see 6.6.4).

31.1.4

Interviews Conducted by the Stake President or Assigned Counselors

The stake president or assigned counselors conduct the following interviews with stake members. Before interviewing a person for any of the following purposes, the member of the stake presidency ensures that the person has been interviewed or cleared by the bishop or an assigned counselor in the bishopric.

- For renewal of temple recommends (see 26.3.1).
- For ordination to the offices of elder and high priest (see 38.2.5.1).
- For callings to serve in Church positions as indicated in 30.8.
- For an endorsement to enroll at a Church university or college (see 15.3).
- For an endorsement to participate in the Perpetual Education Fund loan program, where the program is approved (see 22.13).

If a counselor in the stake presidency encounters serious matters in an interview, such as transgressions that require confession, he refers the member to the bishop without delay.

31.1.5

Interviews Conducted by the Bishop

The bishop conducts the following interviews with ward members:

- For temple recommends for those who are receiving their own endowment or are being married or sealed in a temple (see 26.3.1).
- For limited-use recommends for new converts (see 26.4.2).
- For recommendation of missionary candidates (see 24.4.2).

- For ordination to the offices of elder and high priest, when authorized by the stake presidency (see 38.2.5.1).
- For annual tithing settlement (see 34.4.1.5).
- For callings to serve as ward organization presidents.
- For ordination to the office of priest (see 38.2.5.2).
- For ordination of male converts to offices in the Aaronic Priesthood (see 38.2.5.2).
- For callings to serve as assistants in the priests quorum.
- Of youth (see 31.1.7).
- For fast-offering assistance (see 22.2.2).
- For an endorsement to enroll or continue enrollment at a Church university or college (see 15.3).
- For helping members repent of serious sins (see chapter 32).

The bishop also meets regularly with the elders quorum president and the Relief Society president both separately and together (see 8.3.1 and 9.3.1).

31.1.6

Interviews Conducted by the Bishop or Assigned Counselors

The bishop or assigned counselors conduct the following interviews with ward members. Only the bishop addresses concerns about chastity, associated moral matters, and other serious sins in these interviews. If a counselor encounters serious matters, such as sins that require confession, he refers the member to the bishop without delay.

- For renewal of temple recommends and limited-use recommends (see 26.3, 26.4, and 26.5).
- For callings to serve in Church positions as indicated in 30.8.1.
- For baptism and confirmation of 8-year-old children who are members of record or, if they are not members of record, have at least one parent or guardian who is a member (see 38.2.3.3).
- For callings to serve as the deacons quorum president, counselors, and secretary; teachers quorum president, counselors, and secretary; priests quorum secretary; and Young Women class presidents, counselors, and secretaries. However, only the bishop may set apart the deacons and teachers quorum presidents.

- For 11-year-olds as they move from Primary. During this interview, the bishop or his assigned counselor also interviews the young men to determine whether they are worthy and prepared to receive the Aaronic Priesthood. He interviews the young women in preparation for entering the Young Women program.
- For ordination to the office of deacon or teacher (see 38.2.5.2).
- Of youth and young single adults (see 31.1.7 and 31.1.8).
- For patriarchal blessings (see 38.2.12).
- For a priesthood holder who desires to act as voice in a priesthood ordinance in another ward but does not have a temple recommend. If the person is worthy, the bishopric member fills out and signs a Recommend to Perform an Ordinance form.
- For members who are entering military service (see 38.9.2).
- For an endorsement to participate in the Perpetual Education Fund loan program, where the program is approved (see 22.13).

31.1.7

Guidelines for Youth Interviews

31.1.7.1

Role of Parents

Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their children the gospel of Jesus Christ. They help their children grow spiritually and prepare to make and keep sacred covenants. Parents also counsel with their children regarding worthiness and help them repent and improve. Bishops and other Church leaders support parents in these efforts.

31.1.7.2

The Bishop's Communication about Interviews

As a young woman prepares to become part of the Young Women organization and as a young man prepares to receive the Aaronic Priesthood, the bishop shares with youth and their parents the following information about interviews. He could do this as part of the annual Temple and Priesthood Preparation meeting or at other times as needed.

- Parents have the primary responsibility to teach and nurture their children.
- The bishop or one of his counselors will interview the young man or young woman at least twice a year for the reasons outlined in 31.1.7.3. A bishopric member may also meet with youth to answer questions, give support, or extend assignments.
- To help youth prepare spiritually, interviews are required for sacred matters such as temple recommends, priesthood ordinations, and mission calls. Leaders work with parents to help youth prepare for these interviews.

- Parents encourage their children to meet with the bishop when they need his help with spiritual guidance or with repentance.
- If a youth desires, he or she may invite a parent or another adult to be present when meeting with the bishop or one of his counselors.

31.1.7.3

Purposes of Interviews

Bishops and their counselors have a sacred responsibility to lead, teach, and inspire youth. Effective personal interviews are one important way they do this. During these interviews, the bishop and his counselors teach youth about becoming disciples of the Savior. They help youth consider how well they are following the Savior and His teachings. Interviews should be uplifting spiritual experiences.

Interviews provide an opportunity to reaffirm each youth's limitless potential as a child of God. Interviews also provide an opportunity to inspire youth to develop plans to draw closer to Heavenly Father and to improve in all areas of their lives.

As representatives of the Savior, bishops are divinely appointed judges in Israel. In this role, they conduct interviews to determine worthiness and to help youth repent of transgressions.

Those who conduct interviews express love and listen carefully. They encourage youth to talk rather than doing most of the talking themselves.

31.1.7.4

Frequency of Interviews

The bishop interviews each young man and young woman at least annually. If possible, he interviews each 16- and 17-year-old twice a year. If this is not possible, he assigns a counselor to conduct some of these interviews.

After the annual interview with the bishop, each young man and young woman ages 11–15 usually has an interview at another time during the year with the counselor in the bishopric who oversees the Aaronic Priesthood quorum or Young Women class in which the youth participates.

Acting with inspiration and wisdom, bishops may adjust the frequency of interviews. Some youth may need added attention, while others may need less frequent interviews than are suggested, though all should be interviewed at least annually. Ward size, geography, schedules, and other circumstances may also affect the frequency of interviews.

31.1.7.5

Matters for Discussion

Key matters for discussion include the growth of the young person's testimony of Heavenly Father, the mission and Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the restored gospel. The bishop and his counselors emphasize the importance of keeping baptismal covenants. They teach youth to prepare to make and keep temple

covenants through daily righteous living. Bishopric members encourage youth to pray regularly in private and with their family and to study the scriptures. They also encourage youth to stay close to their parents.

When discussing obedience to the commandments, the bishop and his counselors make appropriate use of the limited-use temple recommend interview questions and the standards and explanations in *For the Strength of Youth*. Leaders adapt the discussion to the understanding and questions of the youth. They ensure that discussions about moral cleanliness do not encourage curiosity or experimentation.

The bishop and his counselors may also address the matters listed below:

Priesthood ordination. With young men, they discuss the blessings and duties of holding the Aaronic Priesthood (see Doctrine and Covenants 20:46–60; 84:31–48; recent general conference addresses on the subject; and 10.1.1 and 10.1.2).

Seminary. For youth of the appropriate age, they encourage regular seminary attendance and emphasize the blessings that come from regular participation.

Missionary service. They give special attention to preparing young men to serve a full-time mission (see 24.4.2). Young men are encouraged to serve, and young women, when they desire, may be recommended to serve (see 24.0). They discuss preparing spiritually by being worthy, studying the gospel, and building a testimony. They also discuss preparing physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially.

Standard interview questions for full-time missionary candidates are available at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/mss](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/mss). The bishop reviews these questions with the candidates and their parents before the mission interview.

Members of the bishopric should be sensitive to the circumstances under which young men are honorably excused from full-time missionary service (see 24.3.3). The bishop discusses opportunities for service missions with young men and young women, as applicable (see 24.2.2).

Temple. They ensure that youth understand the blessings of temple covenants and temple marriage and the requirements for receiving these blessings. To issue or renew a temple recommend, they ask the standard limited-use temple recommend questions. As needed, they adapt the questions to the age and circumstances of youth.

31.1.8

Interviews of Young Single Adults

The bishop or an assigned counselor interviews each young single adult. These interviews are usually held annually. However, acting with inspiration and wisdom, the bishopric may adjust the frequency of these interviews.

31.1.9**Interviews of Persons to Be Readmitted by Baptism and Confirmation**

For instructions about interviewing persons who had their Church membership withdrawn or have resigned membership and want to be readmitted by baptism and confirmation, see 32.16.2.

31.2**Counseling****31.2.1****General Guidelines**

Stake presidents and bishops counsel stake and ward members who seek spiritual guidance, who have weighty personal problems, who have doctrinal questions, or who have committed serious sins. Stake presidents and bishops may delegate some of this counseling to their counselors, though not when a member has committed serious sins. In appropriate cases, such as when a family has financial struggles, a bishop or stake president may also delegate some counseling to Melchizedek Priesthood holders who are qualified to assist. A person whom a bishop or stake president assigns to counsel a member reports regularly to the leader who made the assignment. The person also maintains confidentiality.

Church members should make a diligent effort, including earnest prayer and scripture study, to find solutions and answers themselves. If they still need help, they should counsel first with their bishop. If necessary, he may refer them to the stake president. Local leaders should discourage members from calling, visiting, or writing to Church headquarters about personal matters (see 38.8.26).

The stake president and bishop are entitled to the discernment and inspiration necessary to be spiritual advisers and temporal counselors to ward members who need such help. They should prepare spiritually before counseling a member by seeking the power of discernment and the guidance of the Spirit. This guidance usually comes as impressions, thoughts, or feelings. The Spirit often prompts leaders to remember teachings from the scriptures and from latter-day prophets.

Leaders should frequently use the scriptures and the words of latter-day prophets in offering counsel. These inspired words should be used with sensitivity, love, and warmth. They should be used to inspire and encourage, not to coerce or cause fear.

Leaders should schedule adequate time for appointments. Members should not feel that leaders are too busy and can devote only a few minutes to them. Leaders should also help members feel comfortable as an appointment begins.

If the stake president or bishop does not feel prepared to counsel a member, he schedules another appointment. Between appointments he seeks guidance through study, prayer, and, if necessary, fasting. He may also confer with his priesthood leader.

31.2.2**Spiritual Self-Reliance**

Leaders encourage members to develop spiritual self-reliance. Leaders avoid making decisions for those whom they counsel. Instead, leaders help them make their own decisions with the Lord's guidance.

The stake president or bishop should also avoid immediately offering solutions to those he counsels. To the extent possible, he helps them analyze and resolve their own problems or questions in the context of the doctrine of the gospel and the plan of salvation. Ideally, he teaches members how to find solutions and strength from the scriptures on their own.

31.2.3**Questions and Listening**

When counseling, the stake president or bishop asks questions to help him understand the member's situation. He avoids unnecessary probing. Questions usually should bring out feelings and thoughts rather than *yes* or *no* replies. Members should do most of the talking.

While members talk, the stake president or bishop listens carefully, giving full and sincere attention. Listening is vital in establishing confidence and trust. People often need someone they trust to listen to them as they work through their challenges and problems.

31.2.4**Repentance and Resisting Temptation**

If a member has committed a serious sin, the stake president or bishop firmly and lovingly helps him or her repent. He teaches that repentance includes exercising faith in Jesus Christ, having a broken heart and contrite spirit, recognizing and forsaking sin, seeking forgiveness, making restitution, and demonstrating a renewed commitment to keep the commandments. If necessary, he informally restricts some Church membership privileges. He should be familiar with the circumstances that may necessitate holding a Church membership council and the procedures for initiating it (see chapter 32).

When counseling members, leaders help them take preventive action to resist temptations. For example, members who are courting, are having difficulty in their marriages, are separated or divorced, or are struggling with minor moral problems may be protected and strengthened by counseling that is designed to help them guard against transgression. Presiding officers need not wait for members to seek such help but may call them in for counseling.

31.2.5**Marriage, Divorce, and Separation**

No priesthood officer is to counsel a person whom to marry. Nor should he counsel a person to divorce his or her spouse. Those decisions must originate and remain

with the individual.

When a marriage ends in divorce or if a husband and wife separate, they should always receive counseling from Church leaders. Church membership councils may be necessary if they have committed serious sin in connection with the divorce or separation (see chapter 32).

A member who is separated from his or her spouse or is going through a divorce should be counseled not to date until the divorce decree has become final according to law.

31.2.6

Professional Counseling and Therapy

In addition to the inspired help of bishops and others to whom he delegates, members may benefit from appropriate professional counseling where it is available. This counseling or therapy can help members understand and respond to life's challenges in healthy ways.

Meeting with a professional counselor to gain insight and skills that contribute to emotional self-reliance is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it can be a sign of humility and strength.

Members should carefully select reputable professional counselors who have applicable licensing. Counselors should respect the agency, values, and beliefs of those seeking help. Incorporating these values is ethically appropriate in professional counseling.

The Church opposes any therapy, including conversion or reparative therapy for sexual orientation or gender identity, that subjects a person to abusive practices. (See "Same-Sex Attraction" and "Transgender Individuals.")

In the United States and Canada, bishops and stake presidents may contact Family Services to identify resources to provide professional counseling in harmony with gospel principles. Contact information is shown below:

1-801-240-1711

1-800-453-3860, extension 2-1711

FamilyServices.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

In other areas, leaders may contact Family Services staff or the welfare and self-reliance manager in the area office for consultation.

If members are unable to pay for professional counseling on their own or through insurance, bishops have the option of assisting with payments through fast offerings. See 22.4 for principles for providing Church assistance.

31.2.7

Priesthood Blessings

The stake president or bishop may give a priesthood blessing if the member who is

being counseled sincerely wants one.

31.3

Keeping Confidences

During and after their term of service in a calling, leaders must keep confidences about matters discussed when interviewing and counseling. A breach of confidence can damage trust, testimonies, and faith. A leader must not discuss confidential matters with others, including his counselors and wife, unless he receives consent from the person he is interviewing or counseling.

If a counselor in the bishopric or stake presidency encounters matters that need to be discussed with the bishop or stake president, he explains this to the member and refers him or her to the bishop or stake president without delay.

If a person moves to a new ward or stake, the presiding officer of the unit from which he or she moved may need to share information about membership actions or other serious concerns that are pending with the person's new presiding officer (see also 32.4.4). Doing so is not considered a violation of confidentiality. However, the presiding officer should not share information about sins that have been resolved.

31.4

Protecting against Misunderstandings

When a member of a bishopric or stake presidency or another assigned leader meets with a child, youth, or woman, he or she should ask a parent or another adult to be in an adjoining room, foyer, or hall. If the person being interviewed desires, another adult may be invited to be present during the interview. Leaders should avoid all circumstances that could be misunderstood.

31.5

Responding to Abuse

While interviewing or counseling a person, a priesthood leader may become aware of incidents of abuse of a child, spouse, or other person. Abuse cannot be tolerated