

Insights on Church Leadership

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Administration and Ministration

Our service in the Church of Christ involves two dimensions: a temporal or material and a spiritual dimension. And so we have a number of leadership activities and procedures that will involve administration and ministration. Some still debate the question of which of those two activities--ministration or administration--would take precedence. Instead of selecting a winning side, I propose that we are dealing with the two sides of the same coin: we should minister while administering, and administer in order to minister effectively.

As a former bishop and member of several priesthood executive committees at ward and stake levels I am well aware of the many statistical data we have to keep track of monthly, quarterly, and annually. I am also aware of the many planning and evaluation meetings, the many interviews to be conducted, and the many programs and activities to be managed. However, without the knowledge gained in the scriptures and by personal revelation we may run the risk of engaging in those necessary activities without a vision of how our reports, meetings and interviews fit in the plan of salvation. In the book of Proverbs we find the following: "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."¹

Administrative Functions As Spiritual Activities

While conducting our meetings, preparing our reports, or performing other administrative functions in the Church of Christ, we are expected to put in practice the principles of the gospel. We do so by exercising the prayer of faith in the performance of our responsibilities², by repenting of our mistakes, and by seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost through the weekly partaking of the sacrament, continuous prayer and study of the scriptures. Without a vision of how the basic principles of the gospel relate to our "temporal" duties in the church, our administrative tasks will have no apparent connection with the "spiritual life" of the gospel, and we may tend not to feel the sacredness of these tasks, thus eliminating part of our joy in the performance of our duties--an essential part of our experience as servants.

In the Church of Christ all administrative functions must be conducted under the influence of the Spirit of the Lord. In all these activities we are helping build His eternal kingdom. The Lord said: "... all

¹ Proverbs 29:18. Some translations may use other words instead of "vision." For example, in the Portuguese translation of the Bible this passage reads: "Where there is no *prophecy*, the people perish ..." Keil and Delitzsch, in their "Commentary on the Old Testament" (6:25) translated this verse from Hebrew into German, and here is the English version of the first part of the verse: "Without *revelation* a people becomes ungovernable ...".

² See chapter 2 for a discussion on the prayer of faith.

things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal ... for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal ...³"

Now, let's reexamine one of our administrative functions, secretarial work⁴, under a spiritual perspective. This is considered by many as an essentially bureaucratic assignment. I heard individuals say that there is nothing spiritual in serving as a ward clerk or as a secretary in Primary. However, it is in part because of assignments like these that our meetings, ordinances (including baptisms, confirmations, the temple endowments and sealings) are validated or sealed in heaven. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following about the mechanics of the sealing power:

"... whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven, and whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven; ... It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of--a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven. Nevertheless, in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation, ... this power has always been given. Hence, whatsoever those men did in authority, in the name of the Lord, and did it truly and faithfully, and kept a proper and faithful record of the same, it became a law on earth and in heaven, and could not be annulled, according to the decrees of the great Jehovah ...⁵"

Without records members of the Church cannot enjoy the full privileges of membership, like service assignments or temple attendance. In fact, in the early history (19th century) of the restored Church we find that a number of Saints crossed the plains without any records. Fleeing murderous mobs some left behind valuable objects and documents, including membership and ordination certificates. Because of that many had to be rebaptized and also reordained to the priesthood, so that they could once again have in their possession records that would prove their membership and priesthood offices.

But far more important than proving membership and office is the fact that with these records our ordinances are validated or sealed in heaven. So we see how spiritually influential the work of a secretary or a clerk is in the plan of salvation.

Now, let's consider another important aspect of this issue--organizational "memory." There is an enormous amount of information and wisdom accumulated in the history of our stakes, wards, organizations, classes, and quorums. Information about problems that had to be faced and how they were solved using the faith and prayers of those who occupied positions of leadership over the years. I believe that any stake with two or more years of existence has enough information to help a brand new stake presidency solve dozens of initial problems.

Yet, quite often in newly organized (or reorganized) stakes, wards and organizations, the new presidencies have to learn how to carry out their duties mostly by themselves. While it is true that the Lord helps us, it is also true that whatever help he has given to a former presidency would help a new presidency become effective much faster. And not only that: by learning through accounts of previous experiences, the new presidencies can be even more effective than the ones before them, thus helping the Lord bless that organization, quorum, ward, or stake with additional light and knowledge--instead of blessing them over and over again with the same level of knowledge.

³ D&C 29:34-35

⁴ In the last section of this chapter I will make an analysis of our administrative meetings under a spiritual perspective.

⁵ D&C 128:8-9. See also Matthew 16:19; Revelation 20:12,15; D&C 132:7

Church Leaders Are Ministers

As presidencies and leaders in general we are servants, and part of the time we are ministering servants. Our responsibility is to help others find--or maintain themselves in--the path that leads to the presence of the Lord. During this mortal journey most of the members of the human family have little or no idea of the steps necessary be on the path that leads to the celestial kingdom. There are people throughout the world--our neighborhoods included--who live their whole lives without ever getting that information. Once we accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ we receive the first four key pieces of information: who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going--or should go. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

"God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits."

So, we know: (1) that we are spiritual sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents⁶; (2) that we lived with them as spirits at a previous and glorious stage of existence, before coming to this earth⁷; (3) that we are here as part of a perfect plan to prepare ourselves for yet another, far more glorified stage of existence⁸; and (4) that we have the possibility of living with our Heavenly Parents again in a stage of indescribable glory⁹. And we know that it is through Jesus Christ and the blessings of the atonement that we can achieve that future exalted stage, and that His doctrine¹⁰ outlines the steps we need to take to get there.

However, not all the details are given at first, and we may desire answers to additional questions like: Why have we come at this specific time and place? What specific role do we have in the Lord's plan? We will receive additional answers through the regular study of the scriptures and the words of the living prophets, and also through our patriarchal blessings¹¹ and the symbolic representations introduced in the temple endowment.

All these pieces of information combined will form a "map" to guide us to the presence of the Lord. However, at first this map will not be completely open in front of us, but it will be unfolded slowly and continuously as we live our lives. Since each one of us is unique, there are no two identical maps; while the scriptures and the temple endowment are the same for all of us, our patriarchal blessings are not

⁶ Hebrews 12:9; Moses 3:5; 6:51

⁷ Jeremiah 1:4-5; Abraham 3:22-23

⁸ Alma 34:32; Abraham 3:24-26. TPJS, p.354. April 7, 1844.

⁹ D&C 76:50,58-62,69-70,89-95; 132:20

¹⁰ See chapter 12 for a discussion on the doctrine of Christ.

¹¹ The patriarchal blessing is a prophetic declaration that manifests the word of the Lord for a particular individual. It *may* include counsels, warnings, promises, and information regarding the past, the present, and the future of the individual. We might call it a customized book of revelation.

identical¹². Our individual roles or missions in this life may look very similar; for example, we may learn that the Lord wants us to preach the gospel and give comfort to others. But since we have been blessed with different gifts, skills, and circumstances, our individual missions will show countless unique details that will not be applied to everybody else's maps.

As ministering servants we can encourage others to receive their patriarchal blessings and their own endowments, and we can also persuade them to continue attending the temple as regularly as they can, and to ponder and pray about their "maps." This exercise is too sacred to be discussed in public, and no efforts should ever be made to change that.

One complicating factor is that at times we may receive parts of our maps that have nothing in it; or even non-contiguous parts that will be close to each other but with a blank space between them. In these situations, we have to exercise our individual faith to deduct what the missing part of our map would look like and connect it to the other two parts. The way to do it is to observe the patterns that the Lord has already shown us in the past. These are chances that the Lord gives us to make our own decisions and act as if we were Him. President Brigham Young taught the following: "At Nauvoo, Joseph dedicated another temple ... He knew what was wanted ... He needed no revelation then, of a thing he had long experienced ... It is only where experience fails, that revelation is needed."¹³

Sometimes we have the knowledge necessary to connect two parts of our maps but we may not be aware that we possess it. These are often strenuous times, and one may spend days, weeks, even months struggling with a particular problem. As ministering servants, especially as home or visiting teachers, we must detect those who are passing through these difficult times—and all of us will certainly pass through this type of experience many times during our mortal lives. We must be ready to provide support, encouragement, and prayers of faith in behalf of those who are passing through these phases. This support and encouragement should not be expressed only through a few handshakes and pats on the back. We have to get involved as far as it is convenient to the individuals being assisted, thus helping those persons find in their own memories the pieces of their maps that are apparently missing.

We can use the prayer of faith¹⁴ to ask for the Lord's direct intervention when dealing with matters beyond our capacity to resolve. Therefore, in such occasions we may help others by searching the scriptures with them so that they can find the connections between the information found in their patriarchal blessings and in their own experiences. Again, I stress that we should only assist them, allowing them to ponder and decipher the logical connections by themselves, and so avoid dependency and promote self-reliance. President Ezra Taft Benson wrote:

"... the time a leader spends in personal contact with members is more productive than time spent in meetings and administrative duties. Personal contact is the key to converting ..."¹⁵

¹² Pondering about the meanings of the symbols presented in the endowment is a sacred and private activity; it should never be discussed in public. However, this knowledge alone won't take us anywhere if we don't stop regularly to consider the "big picture." Some of the questions we must regularly ask ourselves are: what direction are my current decisions and actions pointing me to? Does this direction match the picture my individual map is suggesting so far?

¹³ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.416. April 6, 1853.

¹⁴ See chapter 2 for a discussion on the prayer of faith.

¹⁵ Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.147. April 3, 1981.

Yet, after all our lifelong efforts there will still be missing parts in our maps. It is possible that we will not have our maps completely unfolded in this life, because our temporary imperfect nature will not allow us to have perfect knowledge of all things. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that there are things about our exaltation that will only be learned in the spirit world:

"When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel--you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.¹⁶"

There are still other parts of our eternal lives about which we have little knowledge. Clearly those areas impact our lives, but complete revelations about them are not going to be given us in this mortal stage. They might refer to our pre-mortal activities or our prospective celestial projects, but I will not speculate about this. President Brigham Young said the following: "You may ask me whether the leaders of this Church have received all their endowment blessings. I think that we have got all that you can get in your probation, if you live to be the age of Methuselah."¹⁷

We may also consider these words from President Heber C. Kimball: "Have we got through with our endowments? No, we have not; we have only just commenced, merely received the initiative ordinances, and we are only children in these things yet, but if we are faithful, we shall receive all that our hearts can desire, for the Almighty will withhold no good things from them that love him and keep his commandments."¹⁸

When trying to interpret symbolic representations of eternal realities, we should ask ourselves if we are just trying to satisfy our curiosity without the commitment to refine our obedience. If that is the case we will not receive additional knowledge from the Lord. He said: "... I, the Lord, am not pleased with those among you who have sought after signs and wonders for faith, and not for the good of man unto my glory. ... I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end. ... And to them will I reveal all mysteries ..."¹⁹

Administrative Meetings as Spiritual Activities

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how an administrative function like secretarial work should be seen as a spiritual activity. Now we will focus on our meetings—but not our Sunday services, because one can clearly recognize those meetings as spiritual exercises through which we worship the Lord and are spiritually renewed. Instead, let's discuss the spiritual component of our administrative meetings: ward or stake correlation and welfare councils, priesthood executive committees, and all presidency meetings²⁰.

¹⁶ TPJS, p.348. April 7, 1844.

¹⁷ Discourses of Brigham Young, p.396. October 6, 1863. For those who may not remember, the Bible states that Methuselah lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

¹⁸ JD, Vol.10, p.75, October 6, 1862

¹⁹ D&C 63:12; 76:5,7-8

²⁰ I will propose some further insights about our correlation meetings in chapter 15.

All our activities in the Church of Christ must be done in order²¹ and should have a purpose related to the mission of the Church. Our administrative meetings are opportunities to discuss and plan how the different elements of our Sunday services, lessons, talks, firesides, and occasional social activities can be used to help us all draw nearer to the Lord through spiritual and social experiences. In other words, how to use lessons, hymns, prayers, special talks, lessons, visual aids, films, etc. to help our congregations feel the power of the Holy Ghost and be strengthened by that experience.

So, even our administrative meetings deal with an essentially spiritual matter: how to invite the Spirit of the Lord into our meetings and, by extension, into the homes of both members and non-members of the Church. Whatever apparently temporal matters we discuss in our meetings must be addressed with this spiritual goal in mind²².

²¹ D&C 88:119; 132:8

²² Needless to say that all the members of the presidency must counsel with the Lord through the prayer of faith. Before the meetings we should ask for guidance and wisdom; after the meetings we should ask for the Lord's approval of our decisions and plans of action.

About the Author



Marcus Helvécio Tourinho de Assis Martins is a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in July, 1972. In August of 1978 he became the first black member to serve as a full-time missionary for the Church in the 20th century, serving in the Brazil São Paulo North Mission.

Since then, brother Martins served as bishop, counselor in branch presidencies, member of stake high councils, stake and ward executive secretary, high priests group leader, ward mission leader, temple officiator, stake and ward sunday school president, and teacher in primary, sunday school, and institute of religion. In the early 1980's he also translated the “Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ” into Portuguese.

Brother Martins has worked over the years as a systems analyst and independent consultant for the Brazilian government and a number of private corporations. He holds a Ph.D. in Sociology of Religion, Race and Ethnic Relations, a Master's degree in Organizational Behavior, and a bachelor's in Business Management. He taught religion and sociology classes at Brigham Young University, Ricks College, and currently serves as chair of the department of religious education at Brigham Young University-Hawaii.

He and Sister Mirian Barbosa Martins, herself a native of Petrópolis, Brazil, and a returned missionary with several years of leadership experience, have four children: Flávio, Natália, Felipe, and Cristina.