



# GETTING REAL

*Ministering More Effectively  
to LDS Singles*

LANCE R CURTIS





**Getting Real:**  
**Ministering More Effectively**  
**to LDS Singles**

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## Introduction

Elder Jeffrey R Holland once spoke in General Conference about a single sister he called Molly. One day, Molly came home from work to find her basement flooded. Elder Holland relates her story in this manner:

After Molly called a friend to come and help, the two began bailing and mopping. Just then the doorbell rang. Her friend cried out, “It’s your home teachers!”

Molly laughed. “It is the last day of the month,” she replied, “but I can assure you it is not my home teachers.”

With bare feet, wet trousers, hair up in a bandana, and a very fashionable pair of latex gloves, Molly made her way to the door. But her stark appearance did not compare with the stark sight standing before her eyes. It was her home teachers!

“You could have knocked me over with a plumber’s friend!” she later told me. “This was a home teaching miracle—the kind the Brethren share in general conference talks!” She went on: “But just as I was trying to decide whether to give them a kiss or hand them a mop, they said, ‘Oh, Molly, we are sorry. We can see you are busy. We don’t want to intrude; we’ll come another time.’ And they were gone.”

“Who was it?” her friend called out from the basement.

“I wanted to say, ‘It certainly wasn’t the Three Nephites,’” Molly admitted, “but I restrained myself and said very calmly, ‘It was my home teachers, but they felt

this was not an opportune time to leave their message” (“Emissaries to the Church,” October 2016 General Conference, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2016/10/emissaries-to-the-church?lang=eng>).

Elder Holland has a way of cutting to the crux of the matter. And he isn't the only one. As I listen to their words every six months and whenever opportunity to hear more from them presents itself, I become more and more convinced the global leaders of the Church sincerely care about singles. The ministering initiative which they announced in the April 2018 General Conference shows a great interest in meeting the needs of all members, singles included.

But somehow that concern for meeting individual needs doesn't always translate down to the local level, as Elder Holland's story demonstrates. Clearly her home teachers should have focused more on addressing Molly's needs than checking an item off a to-do list. But at least Molly had home teachers who came to her home. Many LDS singles find themselves ignored, or at best tolerated, in their wards and stakes.

Having been single myself for more than 20 years, I've seen this situation frequently. And having lived in various parts of the United States, I've seen this situation everywhere. The adverse effects this lack of interaction produces upon LDS singles are many. Anyone who feels constantly ignored or at best tolerated won't feel like they belong to the main group. Indeed, many LDS singles truly feel like second-class citizens in God's Kingdom. I believe that our failure as a broader LDS community to reach out appropriately has influenced many singles not only to feel abandoned but also to abandon the Church and the safety of gospel living.

At the same time, I believe our many of local leaders are

doing what they think is their best. They often want to help but struggle with knowing what to do. And because these leaders are often very busy people, it's extremely easy for them to shuffle any responsibility for ministering to singles to someone else — stakes often pass it to the wards, and the wards pass it to ministering brothers and sisters who usually either do nothing or perform perfunctory visits that do little if anything to meet the needs of individual singles.

As we've just seen, Elder Holland provided an excellent example of just such a scenario. Obviously, the brethren sent to minister to single Molly focused on checking off a to-do item in the program of home teaching and not on meeting the needs of the individual. Offering to help clean the flooded basement would be a more effective response. Even more effective would be calling other ward members to assist in the effort.

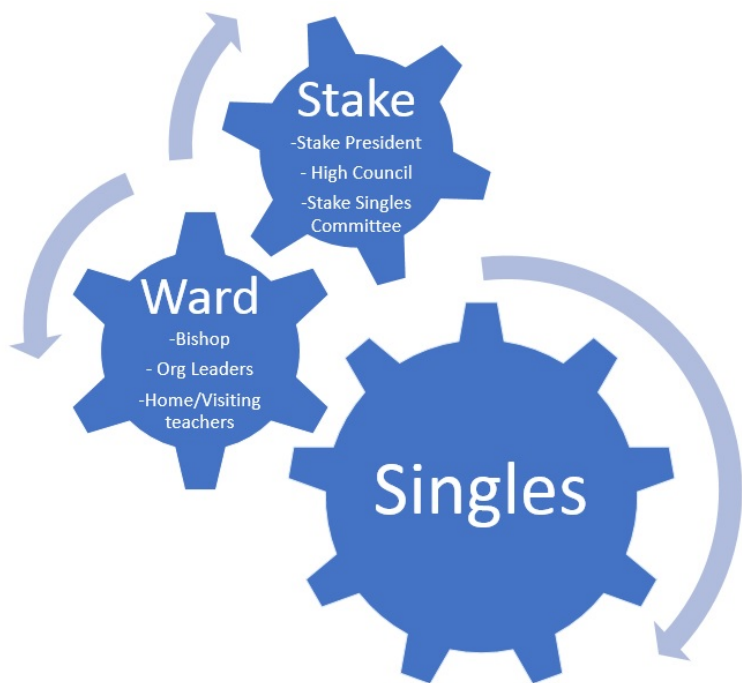
But many LDS singles receive from local leaders and members precisely what Elder Holland described — a perfunctory routine of going through the motions that displays more concern about programs than people. Very often some LDS singles don't even get that. Many local leaders seem to think their only responsibility towards singles is to plan a program of activities; beyond that, the singles themselves are responsible for everything else related to meeting whatever needs they have. When the hour of need arrives, as it does for all of us, LDS singles like Molly are left out to dry (pun intended).

In April 2018, the Brethren announced a ministering initiative intended to meet more effectively the needs of individual Church members. That ministering effort is about caring for the one and serving the needs of the individual as the Savior did during His ministry. He interacted with the individuals He served, building relationships with them and encouraging what was best and noble in each one. Calendaring



a slate of stock activities can serve as a means to that end by providing a platform from which leaders and singles can minister to others. Yet far too often that program is seen as the end in itself, leaving many singles with unmet needs and overwhelmed at the impossible prospect of meeting all of those needs alone.

That's why I wrote this book. Having served in various leadership positions both on the ward and the stake levels, I understand how the various parties can work together more effectively to bless LDS singles more fully. We don't need any



**Figure 1** General overview of relationship between leaders and singles in more effective ministering to LDS singles

special programs or even separate wards for singles. We just need to leverage what we already have in our general membership wards and stakes.

Much of effective ministering to singles can occur while doing what ward and stake leaders do anyway. They just need to acquire the vision of a network that can best support singles, gain an awareness of the part they can play to realize that vision, and then start playing that part. And local leaders aren't the only members of my intended audience. LDS singles themselves have the biggest part to play in meeting their own needs more effectively. In short, only when leaders and singles work together can LDS singles receive the most effective ministering they need.

Figure 1 provides a overview of the relationships between leaders and singles in effective ministering to LDS singles. As we explore each of these roles in greater detail, I'll be providing specific, practical actions that each of these parties can take to play their role more effectively. Local leaders and LDS singles can perform many of these actions while doing what they do anyway.

My experience suggests that, regardless of the role to be played, three main principles guide more effective ministering to LDS singles.

**1. Include singles as fellow citizens in the Kingdom.**

Many challenges LDS singles face result from their identity within our family-centered LDS culture. Promoting a Christ-centered culture can help LDS singles resolve these challenges.

**2. Support rather than supply needs.** We should expect single adults to be just that — adults. We shouldn't foster any sense of dependency among singles

but rather encourage them to do what they can to meet their own needs. Where their needs overwhelm their efforts and those of family members is where the larger community of stakes, wards, and other singles should stand ready to help as the occasion requires.

**3. Promote continued progress towards eternal goals.** By definition, singles lack marriage. The challenges along the road to marriage within the LDS context can leave singles overwhelmed. And it's easy to lose sight of your goals when you're overwhelmed for long stretches of time. When those ministering to singles understand this reality, they can adjust their ministering efforts to meet the needs of LDS singles more effectively.

As we examine in greater detail each of the roles outlined in Figure 1, these three main principles will guide everything local leaders and singles do as part of the larger effort of ministering most effectively to LDS singles.

Ready to dive in? Great! Let's start with the stake level and work our way closer to the individual single adult.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Effective Ministering to Singles by Stakes**

**M**any stake leaders see the charge of ministering to singles as something more appropriate for the wards. What typically happens when stakes pass stewardship for singles to the wards? Nothing. That's because the wards usually don't have any idea what to do. Furthermore, the stake doesn't provide any accountability for ward leaders to meet the needs of singles. Expecting a job to get done without providing accountability is little more than an exercise in wishful thinking.

Even those stake leaders who consider themselves serious in ministering to singles often that conclude the wards should take the job. They know the Savior always showed concern for the individual when He ministered, but the thought of having to do that with the often literally thousands of singles on stake membership rolls quickly overwhelms. After all, stake leaders typically lead very busy lives outside their church responsibilities.

Thus, stake leaders often pass the responsibility for ministering to singles to the wards, thinking that such action is more effective. However, that approach turns out to be completely ineffective, because most wards simply follow the example the stake gives them. They pass the responsibility to someone else, often the singles themselves. After all, ward leaders also typically lead very busy lives outside their church responsibilities.

I once had a stake president tell me forthrightly that this succession of events is actually the more effective approach to meeting the needs of single adults. But no one was doing

*anything* to help singles. Everyone was just playing Pontius Pilate, washing their hands free of any responsibility. I could never understand any logic in that perspective. How does doing nothing support anyone, let alone singles? How can doing nothing be the more effective approach to meeting individual needs? What exactly is doing nothing more effective than?

The idea that stakes can't effectively minister to singles is really a convenient lie. It's convenient because it allows busy leaders to rationalize inaction as their best possible response for meeting the needs of LDS singles. And it's a lie because stake leaders *can* do much to minister effectively to singles.

Admittedly, we're not talking here about stake officers interacting with every LDS single in the stake. That's obviously impractical. But we *are* talking about actions stake leaders *can* take while in the performance of their normal duties that will promote more effective ministering to LDS singles.

### *Stake presidencies*

In the temple, we see a pattern that perfectly describes what all stake presidents can do to minister more effectively to LDS singles. Every assignment given concludes with the instruction to return and report. This instruction adds a measure of accountability to the assignment, and it's that accountability that stake presidents are best positioned to provide.

The best part is that no special program is needed. Stake presidents can provide that accountability in the normal performance of their duties. Every stake president should have regular interviews with every bishop in his stake. During these interviews, stake presidents can minister more effectively to singles by spending a few minutes discussing the bishop's answers to these two questions:

- 1) How are the singles in your ward?
- 2) What are you and the ward council doing to help meet their needs?

In asking these questions, stake presidents should insist on details, especially names. The discussion should focus on individual singles and descriptions of the specific efforts that particular ward leaders and members are making to meet their needs. If this sounds a lot like the way the Brethren have described ministering, that's because it is.

This discussion takes only a few minutes. But what a huge difference that can make! The key is to ask these same questions interview after interview after interview. At first, bishops may not have many if any positive answers to these questions. But by the third encounter, they'll come to expect these questions and so take action beforehand to have better answers in each next interview. Each repetition of these two questions fosters a continued sense of accountability.

In addition, one of the councilors in the stake presidency is often assigned stewardship over the singles. This councilor generally works with a stake high council member who has a similar responsibility for the singles. Working together or separately but in concert, they often see the bulk of their duty as nothing more than overseeing the planning and sometimes administering of stake singles activities. These two men can do much to support effective ministering to singles through these activities, which we will discuss when describing the role that stake singles committees play in more effective ministering to LDS singles.

### *Stake high council members*

A member of the stake high council is often given

responsibility over the singles in the stake. This stewardship commonly translates into overseeing the planning and administration of stake singles activities. As we'll discuss later in this chapter, high council members in this capacity can support committee members to focus on true principles of effective ministering to singles. They also participate with committee members in both planning and administering stake singles activities.

High council members have an additional means of supporting more effective ministering to singles. They usually have speaking assignments throughout the year in the various wards in the stake. Often they bring a speaking partner with them when fulfilling those assignments. High council members who invite single adults to speak with them can do much to foster more effective ministering to LDS singles. Inviting that single adult to address singles issues or the application of the speaking topic to singles life can promote even more good.

Many LDS singles share the universal challenge of feeling that they don't actually belong in the larger community of the Church. Being presented with the need for family they want but don't have week after week after week makes it difficult to focus on the blessings they do have. And when few if any people in the ward greet them or speak with them or sit with them, a feeling of uncaring isolation can easily permeate through the hearts and minds of LDS singles.

Hearing someone — and a single adult no less — speak from the pulpit about LDS singles issues and how the gospel of Jesus Christ applies to singles provides a sense of support for those singles in the congregation. It helps them to feel that their stake leaders are aware of them and their challenges. It also encourages ward leaders and other married members to adopt a Christ-centered culture, one which bases acceptance not on marital status but on willingness to make and keep as many

covenants with God as one can.

I've actually seen this approach work. While serving as a stake single adult representative, the high council member charged with stewardship over the singles invited me to speak along side him in sacrament meeting during his visits to various wards in the stake. I would speak only for a few minutes, but my remarks always reflected remaining faithful through the issues faced uniquely by LDS singles and showing how the gospel can apply in the lives of singles to strengthen them.

After hearing me speak in their ward, singles in the congregation would typically approach me. Some expressed appreciation for supporting them from the pulpit. Some shared with me a special challenge they were facing in the hopes I could offer some encouragement or counsel. Others simply wanted to know how to become more involved in singles activities.

In addition, my interactions with local leaders as a part of those speaking assignments showed that some of their perspectives towards singles were changing. Instead of focusing almost exclusively on married members with children, these leaders began to see our single brothers and sisters more as God sees them. They began to be more inclined to think of them and to do their part to help them. And since much of the “heavy lifting” of effective ministering to singles occurs at the ward level, seeing this change greatly encouraged me.

High council members typically have someone else speak with them when fulfilling a speaking assignment in a ward sacrament meeting. Inviting singles to speak with high council members in the wards is a seemingly small thing that can yield great returns in effectively ministering to singles throughout a given stake.



*Stake single adult committees*

Stake leaders often view stake single adult committees as nothing more than activity planning groups. Such a perspective limits the potential good such committees can promote. It also lacks the vision more effective ministering to LDS singles requires. What exactly is that vision? And how do we gain that vision? What can we do?

Understanding how LDS single adults typically view singles activities may serve to enlighten us in that effort. In my various residencies across the United States, I've found LDS singles principally attend singles activities with one of two perspectives:

1) The Dating Forum — These singles attend singles activities because they're looking for a potential spouse. They want to belong to our family-centered LDS culture. And since the rite of passage in that culture is to be married with kids, they're looking for that special someone who can help them with acceptance into the culture of the larger LDS community. They also want to satisfy their desire for sex, which our LDS culture condones only within marriage. As such, these singles tend to focus their social interactions on those who can help them advance their own agenda while ignoring or discounting most if not all others.

2) The Activity Club — These singles have tired of the complications of LDS dating and just want to enjoy themselves. They tend to associate with a group of close friends without thinking about expanding that group to include someone else who may need their friendship. Like members of the Dating Forum, their

focus is inward on satisfying their own agenda.

Every rule has its exceptions, of course, but my experience having attended literally thousands of singles activities across the country demonstrates most in attendance generally hold one of these two perspectives. These perspectives obstruct LDS singles and leaders alike from embracing the perspective that supports more effective ministering to LDS singles via activities — the Support Network.

Christ always focused on others and fulfilling their needs when interacting with them. We who've covenanted to follow His example should do likewise. Adopting the perspective of the Support Network does just that. It gives satisfying the needs of others more priority over satisfying one's own needs and desires.

Stake single adult committees and the stake leaders who have stewardship over singles have a major role to play in establishing support networks for LDS singles. ***In fact, much of the support singles need outside their own efforts simply won't exist unless stake leaders adopt the perspective of the Support Network.***

The Support Network is essentially applying the ministering initiative to the singles demographic. It's about connecting with individuals, building relationships with them, and doing what can be done to meet needs. Many of those needs can be met simply by being a true friend.

That perspective requires stake singles committee members and the stake leaders who work with them to view activities not as an end in themselves but rather as the means to the end of supporting the singles within their stake. Adopting the perspective of the Support Network, stake singles committees plan activities with the needs of the their singles in view. They never plan activities just to fill a calendar or because that's what's always been done. And then they attend those

activities not just to attend; they align their actions with the ministering initiative the Brethren introduced in April 2018.

One example from my service as a stake single adult representative illustrates this point well. During the planning stages for a single adult conference our stake was hosting, I suggested we move the keynote speaker from Saturday morning in the chapel to Saturday evening during dinner in the cultural hall. Many other committee members objected to this change, claiming the keynote speaker sets the tone for the conference activities for the day. Furthermore, they cited tradition, saying this was the way it had always been done.

However, I knew many of the singles attending the conference couldn't attend on Saturday morning because of work or parenting commitments. I wanted them to have the spiritual nourishment a keynote speaker would provide. That's why I insisted we move the keynote to the evening.

Pulling teeth would have been easier than convincing these people trapped in the habit of always doing everything the same way every time to change. Nonetheless, I stood my ground. Only with great reluctance from other committee members who promised to lay the fault to my charge when it didn't work was I able to secure the change I sought.

Imagine my satisfaction when, after dinner on that conference Saturday, some single sisters approached me and thanked me for making the change in the usual schedule. Because they needed to work on Saturday morning to support their children and then travel some distance to attend the conference, they appreciated having the chance to get some spiritual nourishment from a keynote speaker in addition to the usual social interactions during a dinner and dance. Having worked to meet those needs continues to fill me with satisfaction many years after the event.

That satisfaction can be felt by anyone. Meeting the

needs of others is what service is all about. That's something much more meaningful than simply filling a calendar or going through the rote motions of habitual planning. Leaders in every stake can have that satisfaction when stake presidencies, high council members, and stake singles committee members all adopt the perspective of the Support Network.

In addition to planning activities more effectively, stake singles committee members can participate in those activities in ways that build support networks. In reality, a support network provides a sense of belonging to a larger community. Leaders do that for singles when they greet every single soul (pun intended) that walks through the door to attend an activity and help them to feel welcome. They do that by being sensitive to anyone sitting alone and either sit with them or invite them to join others. These seemingly simple interactions can make a world of difference in the life of a single adult who is struggling and needing the support which belonging to a larger community offers. Again, activities provide a platform from which leaders can minister to individual singles; they are a means to the end of ministering to others and not an end in themselves.

The real magic happens when the singles outside of any formal leadership position are greeting other singles who attend an activity, connecting with everyone to make them feel welcome, and inviting those who sit alone to sit next to them. Then you have a *real* network that can support singles. And you have it without separating singles into separate wards or creating any special program. You have the foundation of what all members — married and single — should experience in a true unity of the faith. *This is nothing less than the vision of ministering which the Brethren have advocated for the entire Church.*

But it will never happen unless leadership adopts the perspective of the Support Network and then leads the way by

example. If the leaders aren't actively building the community inherent in a Support Network, then no individual single adult can be expected to do it. Nothing happens in the Church unless leadership is on board.

Let me repeat that — nothing happens in the Church unless leadership is on board. When stakes simply pass the charge for ministering to singles to someone else, leadership on the ward level is inclined to do the same. But when stake leaders take a more proactive role in supporting singles, they send a clear message of a more effective example to the wards.

Stakes can do more than they typically do to minister more effectively to LDS singles. The examples in this chapter show simple things stake leaders can do to minister more effectively to LDS singles. When they play their part, stake leaders exercise leadership that supports ward leaders in playing their role in more effective ministering to single adults.

## Chapter 2

### Effective Ministering to Singles by Wards

When it comes to ministering to LDS singles, stake leaders often do little more than pass responsibility to the wards. As we discussed in the previous chapter, stakes which don't provide accountability in addition to that responsibility will often leave the needs of many LDS singles unmet. Yet even when stake leaders play their part to minister more effectively to singles, the needs of many LDS singles will remain largely unmet if ward leaders don't follow suit.

It's easy to marginalize singles within wards. Many LDS singles by definition don't possess the mark of belonging in a family-centered culture. Many married members unwittingly act in ways that highlight that lack of belonging. But it's just human nature to ignore those who are different or don't naturally belong. That's the way we're all naturally hardwired to think inside the construct of any grouping in human society.

In addition, ward leaders are themselves very busy. Balancing commitments to family, work, and their callings is a constant battle for time and other resources. When it comes to LDS singles, many local leaders find it easier to let those who don't really fit into the family-centered culture of the Church anyway fend for themselves.

Given the choice to sink or swim, many LDS singles will sink simply because they can't swim without support. That's not our Heavenly Father's plan for anyone, especially members of His Kingdom. His plan is for adults to live with the support offered by marriage. Singles by definition don't have that structure, nor can they completely substitute for that lack by themselves. Without the support which stake leaders and

especially ward leaders can offer, many LDS singles will struggle with unmet needs.

The thought of supporting singles while also supporting their other responsibilities may overwhelm some ward leaders. But just as we saw with stake leaders, many ward leaders can minister effectively to singles in the performance of their normal duties. They just need to change their approach to what they already do rather than add new tasks to their to-do lists.

### *Bishoprics*

The bishop (or one of his counselors) should interview every single adult in the ward at least once every three months. These interviews need not be formal or last more than a few minutes. They can occur at church during the regular block meeting schedule, in the home of the single adult, or wherever the participants agree to meet. Whenever and wherever they occur, these interviews allow bishops (or their counselors) to reacquaint themselves with the lives of the singles in the ward.

The information gleaned from these interviews in combination with the information provided by other ward leaders who perform their roles effectively will allow ward council meetings, welfare meetings, and other meetings where the needs of singles can be considered to support more effective ministering to LDS singles at the ward level. In addition, when LDS singles see their leaders take the initiative to reach out to other singles, that realization can make a world of difference in helping singles to feel loved and supported in their wards. It provides hope they aren't in this mortal journey alone.

Bishoprics should approach their quarterly interviews with a plan in place. For example, listing all the singles in the ward and dividing that list into three parts can provide a simple schedule for these quarterly interviews. The bishop (or one of

his counselors) could interview the singles in the first part of the list during the first month of the quarter, the singles in the second part of the list during the second month of the quarter, and the singles in the last part of the list in the last month of the quarter. This procedure divides the load, making it more manageable for busy leaders to fit these essential interviews into their schedules.

Another approach has the bishopric dividing the list into thirds and each member taking a third to interview every month. This approach offers more opportunity to build a relationship with individual singles, which may be needed in instances where singles have ineffective or absent ministering brothers. As bishoprics counsel together, they can find the contribution they need to make to the singles in their ward.

Regardless of the approach taken, bishoprics should focus initially on only the active singles when starting a process like this for the first time. Once a support network for the singles becomes more established, leaders can then expand their efforts to include less active singles. Reaching out to everyone at the start is self-defeating, because at the start you typically don't have the support network needed to retain less actives. Starting with the active singles and building a sense of community with them first makes inviting less active singles to join in that community and retain them much easier.

A simple hypothetical example can illustrate what this interview process might look like. Suppose the bishop compiles a list of active single adults in his ward and finds 13 names on the list. Many ways of dividing the list into three groups exist, all of them valid approaches. Let's say the bishopric in our example decides to divide the list alphabetically. This results in something that looks like this:



Month 1 (Jan, Apr, Jul, Oct)

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Adams   | M |
| Beecher | F |
| Botcher | M |
| Carter  | F |

Month 2 (Feb, May, Aug, Nov)

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Dorman    | F |
| Douglas   | M |
| Garfield  | F |
| Michelson | M |

Month 3 (Mar, Jun, Sep, Dec)

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Neuber | F |
| Smith  | F |
| Stowe  | F |
| Wall   | M |
| Wilson | F |

This list could have been organized in any number of other ways, including birthdays of the singles, availability of the singles, or just by random selection. However the bishopric decides to organize the list is less important than actually conducting the interviews. According to the plan in this example, every month the bishop or one of his counselors needs to conduct 4-5 interviews lasting a few minutes each. That's roughly one a week — not a huge burden, especially if the interviews occur during the block meeting schedule on Sunday. But it can make a world of difference in the lives of singles who need to know their leaders are interested in supporting them in action and not just in word.

An easy way to maintain this interview schedule is to assign the ward executive secretary to provide reminders of

who needs to be interviewed when. Most bishoprics meet in some capacity before the block schedule. At that time, the bishop or one of his counselors (or all three depending on the approach selected) need only look for the opportunity to connect with whoever is “scheduled” for an interview.

If the bishop feels the need to meet with singles in his office, the ward executive secretary can establish appointments for the interviews every month. In this way, the bishop or one of his counselors need only be at the designated place and time to conduct the interview. The bishopric should provide an updated schedule to the ward executive secretary any time they make any changes.

What should bishoprics discuss in these interviews? They should involve themselves in the lives of the singles. They do this by asking after their welfare and whether they feel supported by their fellow ward members. And they do it by inquiring about their struggles, and their goals, especially the eternal ones. In all of their questions, bishopric members should seek to identify opportunities to provide support for each individual single adult. They should build positive relationships that can help singles to feel supported.

Bishoprics can then take the information gleaned from these interviews into any meeting where the needs of individual ward members are discussed and ward resources are marshaled. In addition, bishops can leverage the information from these interviews to respond to stake presidents who provide accountability in their regular interviews with them.

When a ward ministers more effectively to LDS singles, the information bishoprics provide will usually do little more in their various meetings than corroborate the information provided by other ward leaders (who will have had more frequent interactions with the singles). But the sense of caring and support which quarterly bishopric interviews can provide

for single adults cannot be understated.

*Organizational leaders*

Just as the bishop or one of his counselors should interview each single in the ward every quarter, elders quorum presidencies and Relief Society presidencies should perform similar interviews of each single in their respective organization every month.

Using our earlier example list of singles to demonstrate, here is what this monthly schedule might look like for each organization:

Elder Quorum Presidency

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Adams     | M |
| Botcher   | M |
| Douglas   | M |
| Michelson | M |
| Wall      | M |

Relief Society Presidency

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Beecher  | F |
| Carter   | F |
| Dorman   | F |
| Garfield | F |
| Neuber   | F |
| Smith    | F |
| Stowe    | F |
| Wilson   | F |

For the elders quorum in this example, supplying 5 interviews

per month is hardly burdensome, especially when quorum leadership should provide personal priesthood interviews anyway. The list looks somewhat more daunting for the Relief Society, but there's no reason why the Relief Society president couldn't divide the list with her counselors and conquer by delegation. For this example, that approach would give each presidency member 2-3 interviews to conduct each month.

Taking the initiative to invite singles to talk can make a world of difference. It shows singles they aren't forgotten but noticed. And being noticed brings with it the hope of being understood and loved, two basic needs everyone has, single or married.

Just like the interviews with the bishop or one of his counselors, organization leader interviews last only a few minutes each. The content is also very similar. Leaders and singles can talk about the challenges of singles life, but it's more important to focus on goals and dreams the singles themselves have made, especially those concerning essential ordinances, looking for ways that leaders can help realize them.

Leaders can offer to provide blind dates for singles, but in my experience a more effective way leaders can support singles in realizing essential ordinances is by providing some gentle accountability. Many singles would welcome their leaders asking about their dating efforts and holding them accountable for working towards making essential sacred covenants they have not yet made. Many singles don't have that significant other to help keep them on course. Having someone with whom they can brainstorm solutions to problems and receive encouragement when facing challenges would provide a great measure of support and help them to feel more a part of the ward community.

*Ministering brothers and sisters*

Small and regular conversations between LDS singles and their local leaders can change lives. They help singles feel more supported by and connected to their wards. They can also inform leaders in meetings where ward resources are marshaled, such as ward council meeting and ward welfare meeting. But ministering brothers and sisters, the next evolutionary step from what were home teachers and visiting teachers, provide the real “heavy lifting” in ministering more effectively to LDS singles.

Please understand we’re not talking here about the typical once-a-month, at-the-end-of-the-month get-together to read to others something they can very well read on their own so someone else can check an item off a to-do list and feel good about having done one’s duty. We’re talking here about a real relationship with a real friend, someone who’ll be there and walk with singles when times get tough.

Very often walking with someone means nothing more than doing the small but right things at the right times. Sometimes that may mean sitting with someone in a meeting or inviting that person to sit with you and your family. Sometimes that may mean listening to someone and helping that person feel loved and understood. Sometimes it may mean celebrating a significant achievement. The different things it could mean are infinite in number. But walking with people will always mean connecting with them and doing our best to minister to them as the Savior would.

Elder Holland displayed that understanding during his October 2016 General Conference address about real home teaching. Was it just coincidence he started his address with a less effective example that involved a perfunctory visit to the home of a single sister? I don’t think so. LDS singles greatly

need the support that ministering brothers and sisters are best positioned to supply.

Of course, this model means that ministering brothers and sisters must actually minister. Admittedly, that sometimes doesn't happen. Local leaders should consider carefully who they assign to watch over individual single adults and work diligently to help ministering brothers and sisters of singles to be the ministering brothers and sisters LDS singles need them to be.

The most effective ministering brothers and sisters for LDS singles are involved in their lives. What exactly does *being involved* mean? What are the most effective interactions of ministering brothers and sisters with the LDS singles they visit? Anything communicating compassion, friendship, and true concern is ripe for inclusion. Ministering brothers and sisters should get to know the singles in their charge and truly befriend them. Just talking with singles about the challenges of their lives can be a great support for many who simply need someone to listen to them.

Ministering brothers and sisters can also support single adults through conversations about goals and dreams, especially eternal ones. Admittedly, having conversations about the most widely considered topic among LDS singles — eternal marriage — can be awkward at first, especially since this is a delicate and intimate subject for many. In addition, many of us don't really know the specific steps every person needs to take to secure their own eternal union.

And yet, how can we truly minister to someone and completely ignore that person's next essential ordinance? For many LDS singles, that next essential ordinance is temple marriage. That doesn't happen just because we want it to happen. It doesn't happen just because singles and their ministering brothers and sisters are good friends. It happens

because singles take the right action, part of which is a willingness to engage uncomfortable conversations. Following the guidance of the Spirit, ministering brothers and singles can assist singles in having that uncomfortable conversation and taking that right action.

Singles can feel immensely supported when ministering brothers and sisters together with local leaders have conversations with LDS singles about the obstacles and the opportunities in their individual journey. Granted a solid relationship needs to exist first before these conversations can. But talking about ways to improve one's self or one's approach can provide new insight and new enthusiasm which many LDS singles need in their lives to move forward towards essential ordinances.

Speaking of essential ordinances, providing a little gentle accountability, as mentioned previously, would not be out of place. "What are you doing to move closer to your next essential ordinance?" is a valid question to any Latter-day Saint. An equally if not more effective question would be "What prevents you from having your next essential ordinance?" Such questions allow LDS singles to control their own life while at the same time offering accountability and support to keep moving forward.

The ministering brother or sister or local leader who asks such questions should seek to identify ways in which he or she can assist the single adult in moving forward. At all times, singles decide for themselves what path they will follow, what approach they will take, and what goals they will pursue. But ministering brothers and sisters can support singles to move in positive directions just by asking the right questions and listening with the intent to understand, and then offer assistance with empathy and compassion.

Many think assisting LDS singles secure their next

essential ordinance means providing a date, but more often it means embracing a caring conversation in which counsel is given and potential solutions are brainstormed. Local leaders as well as ministering brothers and sisters can and should seek revelation for their spheres of responsibility, and that includes the singles in their charge. The Spirit can and will provide guidance as ministering brothers and sisters as well as local leaders counsel with singles about the best next steps to take in their journey. In this way, LDS singles can feel supported by their wards, and their local leaders can know the specific actions they can take to support the specific singles in their care.

Of course, such an approach to ministering to LDS singles can and should embrace goals and dreams in addition to eternal marriage. A single adult who needs a better job or a better place to live can benefit from conversations that brainstorm solutions to overcoming obstacles. In all cases, single adults control the vision. They decide what their goal is and what extent of action towards said goal constitutes progress. Ministering brothers and sisters and local leaders should stand ready to support LDS singles in the goals they select for themselves while always encouraging them to maintain gospel standards.

Because the types of interactions described in this chapter (as well as the previous one) are new for many LDS singles and their local leaders, we all need to exercise patience with one another while everyone learns how to play their particular role more effectively. Even more patience is required when it's evident someone is sincerely trying yet missing the mark. That means understanding and forgiving shortcomings. That also means exercising longsuffering by accepting whatever time leaders take to get it right.

With diligent effort, ward leaders as well as stake



leaders can learn how to minister to LDS singles more effectively. Singles can feel more accepted and supported when they do. When we all understand our roles and work to help each other fulfill those roles as best we can, life becomes better for everyone. Of course, local leaders aren't the only ones with a part to play. The singles themselves have their own part in more effective ministering, and that brings us to the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Effective Ministering to Singles by Singles**

**S**take and ward leaders can minister more effectively to LDS singles through small but deliberate actions in specific areas. Yet an approach which excludes the contribution of LDS singles themselves ignores a major component in the overall effort to minister more effectively to singles. LDS singles can do much to support one another and lift themselves to higher ground.

Yes, stake and ward leaders are busy people with so many commitments pulling them in different directions that singles can easily get forgotten. But local leaders won't likely be very motivated to help, even in small ways, if they see that LDS singles are not doing much to help themselves.

Honestly, who can blame them? If you see people who need help not doing what lies in their power to help themselves, how motivated will you be to help? It's human nature to feel it easier to help those who show by their actions they're doing what they can to help themselves.

Of course, our LDS culture plays a role as well. For many years, LDS singles have their own activities and often their own wards. These treatments encourage everyone to think of singles as something separate from the main body of the Church. Combine that perspective with marriage as a cultural rite of passage, and you have a culture which (perhaps inadvertently) encourages our married friends to overlook the singles. It makes it very easy to think, "Well, you singles can do your thing over there, and if you ever get married, then you can join us in the main group over here."

The end result is that many of our married friends in our wards and stakes see LDS singles more as time and energy

saps — one more thing to do on an already full agenda — than as the children of God we truly are. And that perspective of seeing singles as a group apart from the main body allows leaders to rationalize more easily a disengagement from the lives of singles. Who can blame them for having that perspective when singles themselves disengage from other singles' lives and their interactions with each other because they embrace either the Dating Forum or the Activity Club?

Of course, it need not be that way. LDS singles can and should own their lives, taking responsibility for both how their lives have resulted and how their lives will be. They need not — and indeed should not — wait for their leaders to supply their needs. Very often they can help one another take decisive action to improve their lives.

### *Helping other singles*

Too often LDS singles wait for their leaders to mark the road to their happiness. They wait for someone else to take initiative for things to get better. They want something outside themselves to change in order to start living a better life. They want someone else to act to supply them with the help and support they need.

But singles who want to live a better life need look no farther than to themselves, because the most dependable hand they will ever find is the one at the end of their wrist. True, we need the contribution that comes from the community because some needs we can never supply ourselves. Yet the community which does everything for the individual makes that individual dependent on the community. Such a scenario contradicts the intention of the eternal journey upon which we have embarked; our experiences should make us interdependent with God and each other. In reality, both the individual and the community

must contribute to meet the needs of the individual. Finding the right balance of the two will be different for everyone, but everyone needs both.

We've already discussed the contribution that the community of the stake and the ward can make in ministering to LDS singles. What can singles do to care for their own needs? How can singles better contribute to that balance?

They can start by lifting where they stand. They can help build the Support Network that can help themselves as well as other singles. That situation typically isn't seen. Yes, there are always exceptions. But the general rule is that LDS singles who attend activities aren't there to support others but rather to satisfy a personal agenda. They're there to check out the dating scene or, for those who have tired of dating, to enjoy themselves with friends they already have. The Dating Forum and the Activity Club each encourage LDS singles to focus inward instead of following the Savior's example and focusing outward. Building a support network can help singles to obtain and maintain that outward focus.

We've already discussed these two perspectives and the need to replace them with the perspective of the Support Network, but there is one important aspect we haven't discussed that deserves attention, especially with regards to singles ministering to one another. Singles need to act against human nature and continue to make new friends. This is more than just being friendly to new people at activities. This is being a real friend to everyone.

Why would this suggestion go against human nature? When it comes to supplying social needs, everyone has a cup to fill. Not everyone has the same size cup; those who have a large cup seem to be perpetual chatterboxes whereas a little can go a long way for those with a small cup. Regardless of the size of the cup, everyone has a cup to fill. When that cup is full, *people*

*naturally stop looking for new ways to fill their cup.*

What typically results from this scenario? Those singles who need a friend will come to an activity and leave more disillusioned and hopeless than when they came. It's not that the "accepted" singles there are bad people. And contrary to how it may seem, it's not that they're cliquish. They're just normal. Their social cup is full; they have the friends in their own lives who are each regularly filling each other's cup, resulting in a close circle of friends. Their cups are more or less constantly full, and therefore they don't go looking to bring more people into their circle.

And yet that is precisely what needs to happen. All singles will never get the support they need unless we all start acting against the natural man or woman inside us and actively accept new friends continuously into our lives. We must seek new friendships even when our own cup is full.

To be clear, we're not talking about sharing our deepest secrets with everyone or including everyone we've ever met in everything we do in our personal lives. We'll always each have that core group of close friends with whom we share and interact in ways that our more casual friends won't experience with us. That said, if we don't act against our nature and keep reaching out to others in the spirit of true friendship, many singles will not receive the community contribution they need to fill their social cup and otherwise meet needs which they themselves cannot meet.

Of course, leaders should welcome every single soul [pun again intended] and invite them to join the main group. But leaders should not carry that burden alone. The real magic happens when the singles themselves participate in the same activities as leaders in welcoming and including the singles who attend — essentially, ministering to individual singles. When everyone is busy supporting everyone, the burden on every

individual is lightened immensely. And a correspondingly immense increase of light enters the life of every individual.

What if every LDS single who arrived at an activity was warmly welcomed by other singles as well as by leaders? What would happen if all singles could feel loved and supported by their own? How much goodness would then result? And how much potential are we wasting by not reaching after that?

Yes, LDS singles want to find their eternal companion. And yes, they'll always be looking and wondering if So-and-so they just met is that one. That's human nature. The trick is not to allow that good agenda to crowd out the better or best agenda of building a community in which we all love and support each other. We must act against our nature.

When they congregate to support each other before seeking their own personal interests, LDS singles better follow the example of the Savior. They also better align themselves with the true purpose of everyone's journey in mortality — to learn how to become more like Christ. How can any one do that without seeing others the way He sees them and seeking to serve them the way He would serve them?

In the end, we all get what we give. When LDS singles give first priority to fulfilling the needs of others, they set an ennobling example for others, including their married friends, to follow. When all of us — married and single — come together into a community of saints who truly care for each other regardless of status or situation or any other difference, then many of our needs will be met just by being who we are.

### *Helping local leaders*

While LDS singles are busy helping each other, what's to say helping their leaders shouldn't be a part of that effort? If local leaders will be more inclined to help singles when they see

them doing what they can to help themselves, how much more inclined will leaders be to help singles who do what they can to help them as well?

One of the advantages of being single is the freedom to be more selective in who influences you. When you're married, you have someone who is constantly influencing you, either lifting you up or weighing you down. Life is hard for everyone, but it's even harder when you're left to walk that journey alone. My experience convinces me that having someone to walk with them is the greatest unmet need LDS singles have as a collective community.

Our Heavenly Father instituted marriage in part to provide a measure of support. Spouses (at least in theory) can help each other and ascend together towards their heavenly home. LDS singles have the same celestial destination but no spouse to support them. And when all effective ministering to singles from all parties is lacking, that need for support is all the greater.

That's why ministering brothers and sisters play such a crucial role in ministering to LDS singles. They're better positioned than most to be that someone to walk with the singles under their charge. Visiting with a single adult should never be a perfunctory performance. Rather the focus should point towards connecting with an individual personality and building a genuine supportive relationship with another human being. In essence, it's being a real friend.

But the friendship street runs both ways. LDS singles can easily get absorbed in the focus of what they fail to have when the more important focus is often what they fail to give. Many complain that their ministering brothers are not there for them when they need them. But what effort do these same singles make to be there for their ministering brother? They want these priesthood brethren to be more involved in their

lives, but how involved are they themselves in the lives of those priesthood brethren? Expecting a true friend to come into their lives when they themselves aren't being that true friend to others is often an exercise in futility.

As with all human relationships, often the little things are really the big things because the little things matter most. We should seek out the ways, small though they may be, that we can assist those around us. Others will more readily want to connect with someone who is helpful than someone who is insular.

### *Organizing themselves*

On that note, singles can minister to one another by owning their lives and organizing their own activities. They shouldn't wait for leaders to do for them what they can do for themselves. And they have a special blessing living in the 21st century. The advent of social media makes organizing informal activities that are inclusive of all singles easier than ever.

An obvious focus for such an informal gathering would be centered around a hobby or recreational interest. Singles who like reading could form a book club. Those who enjoy writing could form a writers group. Those who enjoy a game or sport could establish a regular game night. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination of the singles themselves.

Speaking of imagination, singles could also organize informal groups around creative efforts to hasten the Lord's work. What if singles got together to help each other find ancestors who need temple work and then went together to the temple to perform the needed ordinances? What goodness would enter the lives of the individual singles who participated in such an informal but important effort?

Or perhaps they could come together to plan a service



project for someone in their ward who needs a helping hand. Perhaps that someone is the bishop or the elders quorum president or the Relief Society president. Leaders will be more inclined to help and support the singles when those singles help and support them.

As LDS singles do the little things that encourage others to build the supportive relationships with them they need in their mortal journey, finding those true friends who'll do the heavy lifting when the time comes will be easier. That's natural law — the Law of Restoration. Alma the Younger explained to his son this law:

O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful.

Therefore, my son, see that you are merciful unto your brethren; deal justly, judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things then shall ye receive your reward; yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again.

*For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.* (Alma 41:13-15, emphasis added)

In short, if you want something to come into your life, then bring that same something into the lives of others. In life, you

get what you give.

Obedying the Law of Restoration is very empowering. It places control for one's life into one's own hands. As we each focus on doing what lies within our own power, we open ourselves to the positive energy attending those who truly enjoy life regardless of their circumstances.

Singles don't have to wait for their leaders to act in their behalf. They don't need to wait for leaders to play their part before they start meeting their needs. They can act in their own behalf to meet their own needs as well as the needs of others.

Focusing on doing what lies within one's own power not only empowers us but also encourages each of us to own our lives. No one will ever have the fullness of joy we can each enjoy right now without taking responsibility for how one's life has resulted. Only when we own our life do we open ourselves to enjoying our present situation in life despite its myriad of imperfections. And it will always have imperfections.

Many LDS singles wish those in their ward and stake would walk with them. But the Law of Restoration says singles first need to walk with their wards and stakes. And that starts when they begin to walk with each other. Doing what lies in one's own power to send out what he or she wants to receive will make receiving it more likely. It will encourage owning one's life. And it will bring more joy in that journey.



## **Epilogue**

### **Bringing it all together**

**I** truly believe the global leaders of the Church sincerely care about LDS singles. But somehow that caring doesn't always translate down to the local level. Many LDS singles find themselves constantly ignored, or at best tolerated, in their wards and stakes by leaders and other members who most of the time simply don't know what to do to help. Ministering to singles can easily get lost in the bustle of everything vying for time and attention.

In an effort to help remedy that deficiency, I've written this book. Hopefully the vision I have attempted to convey in these pages will translate into wonderful support networks for LDS singles everywhere. We don't need new programs or separate wards. What we need are new ways of thinking and more inclusive hearts. When everyone — stake leaders, ward leaders, and LDS singles themselves — each play their part, a wonderful unity can develop.

Ministering more effectively to LDS singles is really about encouraging all of us to come together and truly be one. Thus, learning how to minister more effectively to LDS singles is really learning how to minister more effectively to people. For instance, what's to say a ministering visit to a married couple with children shouldn't include conversations about their goals and dreams? And what's to say the ministering brothers or sisters facilitating that conversation shouldn't be constantly looking for ways they can help make those goals and dreams reality, all while supporting gospel standards? More effective ministering to anyone must recognize the truth that people are people, no matter their current life situation.

For many years, our LDS culture has presented being single as an identity. But being single is really just a life situation. The challenge confronting all Latter-day Saints is embracing a Christ-centered culture in which we all gain our identity within the broader LDS community from our willingness to make and keep as many sacred covenants as we can and not from any life situation or some other factor not entirely within our own control.

I sincerely hope the ideas I've presented in this book will facilitate that end. Ministering more effectively to LDS singles really doesn't take much quantity of effort on anyone's part. But it's the quality of effort toward meaningful interactions that makes the real magic. That happens only when everyone both understands and plays his or her part. And that's why I intend this book to be free for anyone who wants a copy.

If you feel benefitted by this book, please share it or the download link ([www.joyinthejourneyradio.com/books](http://www.joyinthejourneyradio.com/books)) with others you know who could also benefit. We can all come together and truly be one in Christ if we focus on those covenants we've all made to follow our Savior and to keep His commandments. When we do, life will be sweeter for everyone.



## **Frustrated with an ailing singles program?**

You need to get real! Stop focusing on programs and start focusing on people!

## **Wondering what to do with the singles in your ward or stake?**

You need to get real! It's all about meeting the needs of individuals. Everyone has a part to play. And whether or not you have a leadership title, the best part is you can perform the most effective actions in the course of what you're going to do anyway!

## **Ready to make a real difference in the lives of LDS singles?**

Then let's get real! In this book, Joy in the Journey Radio host Lance R Curtis shares tried and true approaches for meeting the needs of individual single adults no matter their age, background, or situation. Brother Curtis takes his experiences being single for more than two decades and living all over the country to show how local leaders and singles everywhere can best work together in ways that respect individual agency, encourage individual responsibility, and help individual singles feel loved and nourished in their general membership wards and stakes. And best of all, it works!