

# Leaders and Members: Messages from the *General Handbook of Instructions*

*Lavina Fielding Anderson*

THE *GENERAL HANDBOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS* is, in some ways, the operational manual for units of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worldwide. A compendium of organizational information, procedural guidelines, and policy decisions, it is updated frequently through mailings of the *Bulletin*, but the last thorough revision was issued in March 1989. Although it is available universally to priesthood leaders, members have virtually no access to it except under supervision and then it is more customary for an ecclesiastical leader to relay the policy or answer than to allow the member to consult it independently.

My interest in the *General Handbook* developed from the larger issue of the differential treatment of men and women in the church. What, I wondered, would the handbook that describes church procedures and policy to male priesthood leaders communicate, both overtly and silently, about the place of women in the church? As I read carefully through the handbook, I discovered that women are virtually invisible except where sexuality or sealings are involved. Instead, the important division is not between men and women but between male leaders and members, both male and female. Furthermore, at a time when insistence on the "specialness" of leaders is widening the gulf between members and their leaders, the handbook is an important player in making and maintaining those distinctions.

## MENTIONS OF WOMEN

The invisibility of women begins on the first page of the handbook, which describes its distribution. Those authorized to receive it include general authorities, general church department heads and auxiliary pres-

idencies, directors of temporal affairs, regional representatives, temple presidents, stake presidents, bishops, mission presidents, district presidents, and branch presidents. The instruction sheet states: "Local Church officers could make a copy of the handbook available temporarily, as needed, to such leaders as high councilors, high priests group leaders, elders quorum presidents, stake mission presidents, ward mission leaders, executive secretaries, and clerks."<sup>1</sup> Except for the general auxiliary presidencies, no woman is on the list. I believe that this list also conveys another message: that no woman *needs* to see the handbook.

Granted, male members without these specific callings are also precluded from having the handbook; but I submit that there is an enormous emotional difference in impact on the two groups. A man may have already been or may confidently anticipate being one of these officers. It does not take an extraordinary imagination for a man to think that one day he might be a clerk. And certainly the other offices are not impossible either for men to imagine, though, in modesty, they may not take that step. But if the reader is a woman, the imaginative effort of thinking, "Someday, I may be a bishop," is more roughly equivalent to thinking, "Someday, I might be a horse." I use the hyperbole to make a point. Women have to become a different species to read themselves into the handbook in the way that, in my opinion, men can do with little effort.

This point became clear to me only slowly as I read on and then back through the handbook. Probably like most readers, I filled in the sparse administrative language with memories of past bishops and stake presidents, with my father, twice a bishop, with my husband, who has served in both a bishopric and on the high council. "How would they behave in this situation?" I asked myself. "How would they interpret these instructions?" I also asked myself, "Could a woman do this? How does this policy or this information impact women? Where would they fit in these instructions?"

When I reached the section on "Church Discipline" (sec. 10), I suddenly realized that I could see only men applying the instructions. The only role for women was to be the recipients—to be acted upon by the policies, procedures, definitions, warnings, actions, and levels of discipline. As I tried to read myself into this section, there is no question which side of the desk I was on. Nor was there any question about which side of the desk held all the power cards. This realization, not surprisingly, affected my reading of the rest of the manual, making it considerably less benign.

I do not, however, think this is a purely personal reaction. Arta L.

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1. *General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mar. 1989), iii. Hereafter cited parenthetically by section and page number.

Johnson of Canada, responding on an electronic network in spring 1993 to the announcement of the newly stiffened missionary requirements, commented to a male participant who felt that the handbook's inaccessibility was not particularly important:

It is a book that remains in the bishop's care. One cannot see it without asking his permission. One cannot photocopy pages and take them away to study. . . . You may have had access to this book and not understand what it might feel like to have a book that contains instructions about how you are to be dealt with, and not have it readily accessible so that you can understand the implications of what it is saying. . . .

If such rules are going to exist, they ought to be published in a place where we have access to them. If I were the parent of a disabled child, . . . I would not want to spend a lot of time preparing them for missionary service, only to learn later that they will not be allowed to serve.

. . . I do know that it is not fun to be a woman and not know the rules by which you are going to be judged.<sup>2</sup>

Women's lack of access to the handbook, though part of the larger problem of members' lack of access to the handbook, has a particularly poignant message. Based solely on the handbook of instructions, the church could operate very nicely, organizationally and structurally, as an all-male organization.

For example, the index contains no references under "women" or "wives." The entry for "Mothers" says, "See parents." "Sisters" refers the reader to "Lady missionaries." There are no entries under "Men," but under "husband" is the subentry, "call extended to wife." There are five entries for "fathers." "Relief Society president" has twelve entries; "bishop" has sixty-three.

The first two lengthy chapters are on "Church Administration" and "Meetings," complete with charts about who may call whom, who needs to sustain whom, and what releasing procedures are, organization by organization. These activities and functions are all male directed and male centered. A ward, I was interested to learn, must have "at least 300 members . . . and thirty active Melchizedek Priesthood holders" (1-5). In other words, the members are important, but one special tenth is essential.

Women may sing in Relief Society choirs for stake conferences (2-1), keep the sacrament tablecloths "clean and pressed," (5-4), and "offer prayers in Church meetings" (11-3). "Unmarried women ages twenty-one through thirty-nine may serve full-time missions for eighteen months" but "should not feel obligated and should not be urged unduly to serve

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2. Arta B. Johnson, electronic transmission, Mormon-L, 25 May 1993; quoted by permission.

full-time missions" (7-1). "Auxiliary organizations may not have checking accounts or petty cash funds," although "Melchizedek Priesthood quorum funds and Scouting funds" *must* have their own checking accounts (9-3). The Relief Society president may attend stake and ward welfare services committee meetings with priesthood leaders. The Young Women's and the Primary presidents may attend an even smaller handful of meetings at which priesthood leaders are present. The *General Handbook's* descriptions of these meetings do not include any mention of consultation, discussion, exchange, conferring, dialogue, or consensus. In other words, there is no indication of what a woman would do in such a meeting besides be there. The bishop's wife, in a student ward, should stay in the resident ward with her children (3-3). "Mature, qualified students, both men and women, should be given leadership opportunities in student stakes and wards" (3-3). New converts should be ordained to the Aaronic priesthood soon after baptism, and "if they are worthy of baptism, they are worthy to hold the Aaronic Priesthood" (4-1). Clearly, women are so completely invisible at this point that the possibility that a worthy female candidate for baptism should be excluded from priesthood ordination does not enter the minds of the writers. Fathers are supposed to attend the ordinations of their sons; there is no mention that mothers may be present (4-2). "Only those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood should partici[p]ate in the ordinance of naming and blessing children" (5-1). This policy reverses an earlier decision that allowed inactive or nonmember fathers to stand in the blessing circle. Significantly, it seems more important to exclude women in this case—probably because of widespread lobbying on the part of Mormon mothers in the United States for at least a decade—than to include potential priesthood holders in this all-male rite. Repeatedly, the duties and privileges of "worthy fathers" are stressed; worthy mothers are not mentioned once in the handbook.

Sexuality and sealings are sections that come the closest to dealing directly with women, but the overall impression is negative because the policies exist to eliminate or resolve problems. For example, bishops are assigned the rather bizarre role of fashion controllers for brides, being instructed to "review . . . requirements for temple wedding dresses with each bride and her parents as early as possible in the planning stages." (These dresses should be white, long-sleeved, "modest in design and fabric, and be free of elaborate ornamentation." Pants and nondetachable trains are not permitted.<sup>3</sup>)

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3. A more recent addition, *Bulletin*, 1992-1, 2, goes even further in providing fashion instruction: "Brides may wear white wedding dresses in the temple if they have long sleeves and modest necklines. All sheer material should be lined. Gowns designed to be worn with long dress pants and dress pants are not acceptable in the temple."

Abortion is "one of the most revolting and sinful practices" of this day but is permitted in cases of conception as the result of incest or rape, when a medical authority certifies that the mother's life or health is jeopardized, or when the unborn child is suffering from lethal birth defects. Even in these cases, the language of decision-making assumes that a "couple" is involved and that the bishop should be "consult[ed]" (11-4). Single women who conceive a child through artificial insemination are "subject to Church discipline" (11-4). Women "who voluntarily submit to abortions growing out of their immoral conduct will not be called on full-time missions" (7-1). Unwed mothers at least seventeen years old who choose to keep their child "should be welcomed into Relief Society."<sup>4</sup>

The section on sealings is complicated and extensive (6-4 to 6-6). Gradually I recognized what it reminded me of: deeds transferring parcels of property from one owner to another. A time-only wedding can be performed in a temple if the wife has been sealed to a previous husband. She can be sealed to a deceased husband from whom she is currently divorced only with the written consent of her present husband, if any, and the surviving widow, if any, of the deceased candidate. A woman sealed to a former husband may not be sealed to a present husband without a cancellation of sealing. The excommunication of a husband or wife "suspends but does not cancel their sealing." "A deceased woman sealed in life to one husband may also be sealed to another man with whom she lived as a wife." "A deceased couple who lived together as man and wife may be sealed even though there may be no documentary evidence of marriage."

The language of the handbook is male throughout. Sacrament meeting speakers are to speak in "a spirit of . . . brotherhood" (2-5). Pronouns are usually male, even in a context that obviously can include women. For example, at baptisms, the one performing the baptism should "call the person by *his* full name . . .," and if an adult endowed member, not sealed as a child in a family, wishes to be sealed to foster parents "*he* must obtain permission" from the First Presidency (5-3, 6-6; emphasis mine). Notable efforts at inclusiveness, which I consider to be important, occur in the section on disciplinary councils, formerly church courts. One sentence states: "All references to transgressors are in the masculine gender, but include the feminine" (10-1). Encouragingly, the October 1991 supplement, in speaking of preparation for a patriarchal blessing, says, "The member may fast if he or she chooses" and speaks of an "unwed parent" as "him or her."

In short, explicit mentions of women are minimal. In most cases, they

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4. 1991 *Supplement to General Handbook of Instructions* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991), 9. This policy establishes that marriage is preferred or, if that is not "feasible," "placing the infant for adoption."

are not singled out for special treatment nor are they specifically excluded. Whether this can be interpreted as inclusiveness or erasure probably depends on the reader's point of view. However, a rather more significant subtext in the *General Handbook* is the leader/member dichotomy which it sets up and maintains.

#### THE LEADER/MEMBER DICHOTOMY

The foreword to the handbook explains its purpose:

This handbook has been prepared to guide priesthood officers so "that they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, . . . and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands" (D&C 105:10). The instructions in this handbook should guide servants of the Lord in directing the Church and helping to strengthen families (xi).

*Duty, direction, requirement, instruction.* Strengthening families sounds almost like an afterthought. I had anticipated subconsciously, I suppose, that at least part of the leaders' task would be defined as testifying of Christ's love, of the Atonement's power to change lives, and of helping people to grow. I found nothing remotely similar. In fact, the picture that forms from these pages of what leaders do is rather unpleasantly intrusive and aggressive. Bishops instruct, direct, conduct "searching" or "detailed" interviews, report (endlessly) to the stake president on an exhausting list of topics, make assignments, issue callings, make sure that two people are present to open tithing envelopes, and ensure that Christmas decorations are not flammable. I looked in vain for instructions to love members, to listen to them and try to understand them, to consult with them about their needs and desires, to respect their agency, to enjoy their diversity, to be guided by the Spirit.

The omission of any reminder to the bishop or stake president of the role of the Holy Ghost was particularly startling. Such instructions appear only three times. First, "members should be guided by the Holy Spirit to answer for themselves personal questions about wearing the garment."<sup>5</sup> It seems to me that encouraging members to be guided by the Spirit could be profitably applied to many areas in addition to this one.

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5. Compare "Instructions for Priesthood Leaders on Temple and Family History Work," n.d., 1: "Members should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to answer for themselves any personal questions about wearing the garment." Lengthy instructions about various styles and colors of garments for endowed members serving in the armed forces conclude: "Bishops normally should not attempt to interpret this information for members. Rather, endowed persons, having read it or had it read to them, should decide for themselves what to do under the circumstances." "Instructions for Priesthood Leaders on Military Relations," 1990, 3.

Second, "Decisions on Church discipline are within the discretion and authority of bishops and stake presidents as they prayerfully seek guidance from the Lord" (10-9). Again, it seems to me that local leaders could be encouraged to "prayerfully seek guidance" in many, many areas where only a dry, administrative guideline is given. Even in the section on counseling, church members are told to "make a diligent effort, including earnest prayer, to find solutions and answers themselves"—certainly an encouraging statement, as far as it goes. However, it continues: "If they need help, they are to consult freely with their bishops and receive from them the counsel they need" (11-2). The assumption is that the bishop unquestionably has the needed counsel. How free would a bishop feel to admit confusion or lack of information with such clear role instruction?

The tone of the handbook is usually directive, even peremptory. It is rare that the reason for a policy is given. The only three examples I found that approached an "explanation" for a policy were: (1) "Local leaders should discourage" adopted children from trying to identify their natural parents "to protect the rights of the adoptive parents" (6-7); (2) artificial insemination using any but the husband's semen is discouraged because it "may seriously disrupt family harmony" (11-4); and wards and stakes may not use the official church logo on locally produced materials because "improper use of the Church logo hampers the Church's efforts to register it as the official Church trademark" (*Bulletin* 1992-2, 2).

A final message to all members—not just women—is that they should not have access to the handbook. The official instructions order priesthood officials to destroy old editions, once a new edition replaces it (xi). Such a policy is not necessarily sinister. It prevents confusion about which policy is the current one. But it also means that there is no sense of history, no sense of change over time, no documentation that things were different in the past and, consequently, will probably be different in the future. The explicit instruction to "destroy," coupled with the spelled-out list of who may have a manual, also suggests urgency and danger, as though something terrible will happen if other people have access to handbooks.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps such secrecy will backfire one day. If members of the church do not know these rules, they can reasonably protest being held account-

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6. I learned recently of a scholar who requested permission at the church's Historical Department library to see the instructions for handling welfare cases during the 1950s. He was instructed to submit his request in writing, explaining what he would do with the information. He was informed that receiving such permission would require the decision of a committee which would have to meet at least once and perhaps twice to make such a decision, so that he should expect a delay of at least two weeks. Fortunately, the materials for the time period of interest were more immediately available at the University of Utah.

able to them; and ultimately, if they have no voice in shaping the policies that impact so heavily on their spiritual lives, it seems to me that they can point out that they have bound themselves by no covenant to accept them.

### THE "SPECIALNESS" OF CHURCH LEADERS

Naturally a handbook's function is not to provide light or inspirational reading. Its job is to be clear and specific. Still, it can be disheartening to read a thick manual that communicates too clearly assumptions of the need to control, minute legalistic job descriptions and meeting formats, lists of rules and regulations, and especially unconscious assumptions of the superiority of leaders and the inferiority of members. I see this assumption in the *General Handbook* as part of a larger, and sadder, trend in the church: the creation and maintenance of a gulf between the "specialness" of leaders and the ordinariness of members.

This gap is particularly pronounced when it comes to general authorities and members. According to the handbook, these relationships are characterized exclusively by two negatives: Members are not to "record General Authority addresses given at regional or stake conferences, missionary meetings, or other local meetings" (11-1), and members are discouraged "from calling, visiting, or writing to Church headquarters about personal matters" (11-2). This distancing of general authorities from followers has, in my opinion, intensified and accelerated within the last six years, as three conspicuous examples illustrate.

First, Elder Dallin H. Oaks's April 1989 conference address, "Alternate Voices," was, in my opinion, an attempt to silence the voices of all but general authorities. He marginalized "alternate voices" in the church, disfranchised members as representatives of the church, and eliminated dialogue and discussion, leaving only the options, for members, of silent listening or "contention."

Let me go into more detail about his disfranchisement of members as church representatives, which essentially deals with external or public relations. Elder Oaks uses the term "Church leaders" or "representative of the Church" five times in four paragraphs in juxtaposition to "members" or "volunteers," also used five times. The term "volunteer" is an odd one, since most members of the church have callings that, at least theoretically, come from God through priesthood channels in exactly the same way that the priesthood leader's calling comes. However, labeling members as "volunteers" suggests misguided and unwanted zeal. Oaks continues:

Church leaders are sometimes invited to state the Church's position at a debate or symposium. . . . But the Church is directed to avoid disputation and contention. Moreover, if a representative of the Church participated in such



an event, this could have the unwanted effect of encouraging Church members to look to the sponsors of alternate voices to bring them information on the positions of the Church. . . . Church leaders should avoid official involvement, directly or indirectly. Volunteers do not speak for the Church. . . . The Church's silence [does not] constitute . . . an admission of facts asserted in that setting.<sup>7</sup>

The structure of Elder Oaks's argument juxtaposes leaders and members. The term, "Church leader," is usually situation specific, ranging from the Primary president in an in-service meeting to a stake president at stake conference. Elder Oaks, however, uses "leader" to mean exclusively "General Authority," a cultural and perhaps theological innovation of this address with which I am uncomfortable. In this context, the Young Women's general president, a general board member, a missionary, that missionary's president, or a stake president would not be a leader but a member. Thousands of LDS women would perhaps be surprised to learn that Barbara B. Smith's energetic defense of the church's anti-ERA position during the 1970s was not made as a church "leader."

In short, to Elder Oaks members are not leaders and, more troubling, leaders do not seem to be members. I am disturbed by an image of leadership that defines itself as different in kind from members, that sets itself sharply apart from members, assigns members to be "examples" and "missionaries" for the church, denies that these "volunteers" represent the church, refuses to provide "authorized" representatives except as it chooses (which, I think, implies that it holds itself aloof from dialogue, questioning, or providing explanations which may be discussed), and then also insists that its silence does not become one of the elements of that dialogue. If a friend treated me in such a way, I would not know which to deplore first—the naivete of thinking that refusing to converse is not a message, or the arrogance of claiming a relationship but refusing the demands inherent in that relationship. Whatever problem Elder Oaks was trying to solve with his address or whatever the motives that prompted this approach, I feel that the consequences are deplorable. Perhaps, if he did not intend his message to read so harshly, a clarification would be in order.

The second example is Elder Russell M. Nelson's April 1993 general conference address, "Honoring the Priesthood," which is focused on prescribing "proper priesthood protocol" or "complete deference to . . . an order of correct procedure."<sup>8</sup> He devotes over half of his address to a list of such procedures. The first is to always call priesthood leaders by their titles. (I need hardly mention that women have no such titles, so they are

7. Dallin H. Oaks, "Alternate Voices," *Ensign* 19 (May 1989): 28.

8. Russell M. Nelson, "Honoring the Priesthood," *Ensign* 23 (May 1993): 38.

always the addressor, never the addressed.) When a presiding officer "comes into a meeting where you had been presiding, please consult with him immediately for instruction," Elder Nelson tells bishops and stake presidents. In a meeting no one speaks after the presiding general authority has spoken. The stake president should "remain at the side of your file leader until excused." I found the reason for this attendance particularly interesting: "He may be impressed to give additional teaching or direction. And you may also prevent problems. For example, if a member asks a question of your leader that should not have been directed to him, you are there to respond." Apostles honor seniority even to the point of "entering or leaving a room" in seniority.<sup>9</sup> A friend who observed the party of general authorities returning to Salt Lake City after the dedication of the San Diego temple confirmed that they entered the plane in order of seniority.

Nor can Elder Nelson's call for protocol be explained as a personal hobby-horse. Speaking earlier in the same conference, Elder Dallin H. Oaks began his address, "The Language of Prayer," with a lengthy introduction about the importance in military, judicial, and ecclesiastical settings of using correct titles:

The use of titles signifies respect for office and authority.

The words we use in speaking to someone can identify the nature of our relationship to that person. They can also remind speaker and listener of the responsibilities they owe one another in that relationship. The form of address can also serve as a mark of respect or affection.<sup>10</sup>

What he does not point out, but a point which is difficult to overlook, is that the use of an honorific title by a subordinate reinforces nonegalitarian relationships, emphasizes the power differential between the two, and reduces the psychological and social base of the subordinate.

In the third example, Elder Boyd K. Packer, speaking to the All-Church Coordinating Council, consisting of auxiliary, department, and division heads, in May 1993, singled out homosexuals, feminists, "and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals" as "dangers" to the church. He warned that these groups had "made major invasions into the membership of the Church."<sup>11</sup> He began with a disturbing anecdote. As a newly appointed supervisor of seminaries and Institutes of Religion in 1955, he made an appointment to see Elder Harold

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9. "Honoring the Priesthood," 39-40. Elder Ballard suggests that John the Beloved did not enter the tomb of Jesus before Peter because "he deferred to the senior Apostle" (40).

10. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Language of Prayer," *Ensign* 23 (May 1993): 15.

11. Boyd K. Packer, "All-Church Coordinating Council," 18 May 1993, 4, photocopy of typescript in my possession.

B. Lee, who was then just junior to Joseph Fielding Smith. Elder Packer said:

Elder Lee had agreed to give me counsel and some direction. He didn't say much, nothing really in detail, but what he told me has saved me time and time again.

"You must decide now which way you face," he said. "Either you represent the teachers and students and champion their causes or you represent the Brethren who appointed you. You need to decide now which way you face." Then he added, "Some of your predecessors faced the wrong way."<sup>12</sup>

The phrase "saved me time and time again" suggests urgency and danger—that dealing with leaders is high-risk and perilous. Elder Packer then related several incidents of "facing the right way" and urged his listeners to do the same, by which he meant that they were not to "represent" anyone but the general authorities. They were not to "become [the] advocates" of members of the church who are "hurting" or "think they are not understood." He offered no suggestions for how general authorities may receive information about members or from members. Rather, he warned that when a church officer "becomes their [members'] advocates—sympathize with their complaints against the Church, and perhaps even soften the commandments to comfort them, . . . then the channels of revelation are reversed."<sup>13</sup>

My image of the church is of a community, an extended family, in which the different parts value each other, work to understand each other, listen to each other, and try to help each other. I see faces turning in many directions, down to a child, up to an older adult, right or left to a friend and back again. Elder Packer's image is one of only two directions, of rigid role definitions in which leaders speak and members listen, of faces turned determinedly away from those in pain. It is an image of marionettes, of robots.

I think I am not mistaken in identifying this gulf as having been created by the leaders. Yes, members contribute to its maintenance out of an anxiety for orthodoxy and obedience. But in organizational terms, it primarily serves the need of leaders for docile, passive, compliant followers who will not challenge directives, insist that their needs merit the same consideration as the leader's desires, or expect to be consulted and listened to. It is hard not to see this relationship as self-serving and potentially, if not actually, abusive of the spiritual life of members.

It is fortunate indeed that the religious life of most members of the church is lived in families, neighborhoods, wards, and stakes. Although

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12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. *Ibid.*, 6.

there are exceptions, these settings function as communities of affection, affiliation, and learning. A man who is a fanatic (and fantastic) Scoutmaster today may be a struggling bishop tomorrow and a bored Sunday school president five years later. A woman who may not like the church's financial devotion to the Scouting program and who may resist the Scoutmaster's enthusiasm will teach his daughter in Laurels and be his wife's visiting teaching companion. This man will be aware that there are other opinions about how useful the money spent on Scouting is. He will set the woman apart for a calling in the Relief Society, be grateful for her impact on his daughter, and eat her casserole when his wife has an operation. They will pray with and for each other. The fluidity of callings, the presence and visible contributions of all members, and the long-term growth observed in oneself and in others over time all work against rigid roles, an emphasis on protocol at the expense of service, and the systemic devaluing and demeaning of some segments of the congregation at the expense of others. Exposure to real people in real wards, in other words, rather than isolation behind walls of protocol and rules, intensifies my testimony that the gospel is lived out in relationship. Jesus warned his disciples:

Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,  
And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts (Mark 12:38-39).

I wonder if this could apply to leaders who insist on strict dress codes, enjoy the deference paid to them, and regulate their behavior among themselves by strict protocol. I think of the counsel of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob, a passage that is extremely consoling:

O then, my dear brothers and sisters, come to the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his ways are righteous. . . . The Holy One of Israel guards the gate. He does not have a servant there. No one can come in except at the gate, and he cannot be tricked. . . .

He will open the door to whoever knocks.

The next part of this scripture is often, I think, quoted against intellectuals. But I wonder if it applies to anyone who puts himself or herself in the place of Christ, the gatekeeper, and becomes the gatekeeper instead, keeping people out or pouring energy into rulemaking and rule enforcement rather than the pure gospel of love and good works. The scripture continues:

He will open the door to whoever knocks, but he hates those who are

proud because of their wisdom and education and riches [and perhaps we might add, their special positions or their special access to special information]. If they do not throw away all those things, and think of themselves as fools before God, and become humble, he will not open the door to them.

... the things which are for those who are truly wise—that is, the happiness prepared for the saints—will not be given to them.<sup>14</sup>

Truly, it behooves all of us to give serious heed to the charge to seek humility and true wisdom. And here Jesus himself set the example. To settle a dispute among the highest officers of his church about the protocol of precedence, he stripped off his clothes, girded himself in a towel, and washed the feet of his apostles. I believe that this model of humble service is one that is still, despite tremendous pressure in the other direction, alive and well in the Church of Jesus Christ.

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14. 2 Ne. 9:41-43: Lynn Mathews Anderson, *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon*, photocopy of typescript, Feb. 1993. This passage in the authorized version of the Book of Mormon reads:

O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name.

And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.

But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints (2 Ne. 9:41-43).