AN ESSAY ON CULTURE, AUTHORITY, AND STEWARDSHIP

WHEN SUPPORT COMPETES

The Proper Order of Family, Ward, and Stake Activities

A leadership essay for stake and ward priesthood and organization leaders.

> *"Just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it."*

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Executive Summary

No faithful Church leader sets out to compete with the family. Most activities are proposed for good reasons: fellowship, testimony, service, safety, mentoring, or wholesome recreation. Yet good intent does not settle the question of proper order. An activity may be enjoyable, well attended, competently planned, and still be assigned to the wrong level, repeated too often, or added to a calendar whose combined effect weakens the very households it is meant to bless.

The General Handbook establishes an order of support. God's work is centered in the home and supported by the Church. Most activities occur at the ward level. Stake activities are periodic and supplemental. Stake organizations instruct and support ward leaders; they do not absorb duties that belong to families, wards, quorums, or classes. This is more than an administrative preference. It protects stewardship, preserves family agency, and gives local presidencies real work through which revelation and leadership can develop.

The principles can be tested against one local example: a deacons quorum presidency confronted with a polished, already-planned stake camp that arrives as an expectation rather than a question. When the presidency is not asked whether the activity serves its quorum, it may retain formal keys and titles while losing the practical field in which to discern, plan, persuade, and lead. The example matters because it exposes a broader risk. Support can become substitution, and substitution can quietly remove duty.

THE GOVERNING QUESTION

The governing question is not simply whether an activity is good. It is what need the activity meets, why it must be done at that level, what local duty it preserves, and what cumulative effect it has upon real families.

The same analysis must be made across the whole Church calendar. A stake event multiplies across wards. Separate Young Men, Young Women, Relief Society, elders quorum, Primary, and leadership calendars then converge upon the same household. What appears occasional to each organization can become constant to the family. The correct test is therefore not merely whether a stake event conflicts with a ward event. It is whether the combined calendar competes with the family's sacred time, energy, relationships, and governing responsibility.

This is an interpretive leadership essay, not a claim to replace the keys or judgment of presiding officers. Its appeal is to use those keys within the order the Handbook itself supplies: home-centered, ward-grounded, stake-supported, purposeful, coordinated, and free of needless pressure.

1. A Good Activity Can Still Be Out of Order

Church leaders usually encounter calendar questions as proposals for some evident good. A camp can build friendship. A conference can inspire. A service project can bless a community. Recreation can help youth belong. None of those goods is trivial. But the existence of a good does not answer whether this activity, at this level, at this frequency, and with this duration should claim the time now proposed.

> *"Just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it."*

—President Dallin H. Oaks, "Good, Better, Best"

The distinction between good, better, and best is a doctrine of ordering. It asks leaders to compare goods that compete for finite mortal resources. Time spent at one activity cannot also be spent in family conversation, a quorum presidency meeting, ministering, work, rest, study, or unstructured companionship. The issue is not whether one of those alternatives looks more impressive on a report. The issue is what the Lord has assigned, to whom He has assigned it, and what combination will bring the most enduring fruit.

Attendance is therefore weak evidence by itself. High attendance may show that an event was attractive, convenient, customary, or socially expected. It does not prove that the stake was the proper sponsor, that the frequency was wise, or that families were strengthened on balance. Enjoyment is also insufficient. Fun is a legitimate feature of youth activity, but the Handbook gives activities multiple purposes and requires planning to begin with spiritual and temporal needs. A pleasant outcome cannot retroactively supply a purpose that was never discerned or stated.

The more consequential an activity becomes—more wards, more nights, more leaders, more preparation, more transportation—the stronger the need for an articulated purpose and a clear reason for placing it at that organizational level. Permission to hold an activity is not a presumption that it should be held.

2. The Order the Handbook Establishes

The home is the center

The General Handbook begins its treatment of individuals and families with a governing truth: the work of salvation and exaltation is centered in the home and supported by the Church. Families carry primary responsibility for teaching, covenant living, worship, care, and growth. Church organization exists to help families do what God has entrusted to them—not to occupy every available hour with worthy institutional alternatives.

> *"It is time for a home-centered Church, supported by what takes place inside our branch, ward, and stake buildings."*

—President Russell M. Nelson, October 2018

Section 2.3 of the Handbook is unusually practical. It explains that many Church meetings, activities, and programs are not essential and should be organized as needed according to people, families, circumstances, and resources. Families decide their participation in nonessential programs. Leaders are to avoid overwhelming members or asking for excessive sacrifice. Church service is not meant to consume the capacity required for faithful life at home, at work, and in the community.

Home evening is described as sacred time, but the principle is larger than one reserved night. Family time is not secular residue left after Church claims are satisfied. It is itself a principal setting of the Lord's work. A council that protects a Tuesday meeting while consuming Thursday through Saturday has not necessarily protected the home-centered order.

The ward is the ordinary local setting

The Handbook says that most Church activities are held at the ward level (20.3.1). This places ordinary activity close to the people, the bishop, the parents, and the youth presidencies who know local needs. Ward and quorum leaders can adjust quickly, include individuals who might be missed by a larger program, and align activities with the particular spiritual and temporal work already under way.

That local placement is not merely a convenience. It creates meaningful stewardship. A deacons quorum presidency learns to seek revelation because there is something real to decide. A Young Women class presidency learns to counsel because the calendar is not already supplied. Advisers learn to mentor rather than manage because youth leaders actually have room to lead.

The stake is a source of support and periodic strength

The stake can gather people and resources in ways a ward cannot. Periodic stake or multistake activities may be especially useful where membership is sparse, specialized support is needed, or a larger gathering serves a distinct purpose. But the Handbook repeatedly defines this role as supplemental. Stake activities should support the work of wards, be coordinated with them, and not compete with ward activity (20.3.1–20.3.2; 29.3.9). They should not be so frequent that they burden wards.

Chapter 6 states the boundary with particular clarity. Stake organizations support and instruct ward presidencies. "They do not fulfill assignments that should be fulfilled at the ward or family level." It then directs them not to create additional responsibilities for ward organization presidencies (6.7). These paired directions protect both jurisdiction and capacity. The stake should strengthen local stewards without becoming their program office or adding work that they must service.

THE ORDER OF SUPPORT

The order is therefore plain. Family responsibility is primary. Ward, quorum, and class stewardship is local and ordinary. Stake activity is periodic and supplemental. Reversing that order can produce excellent events while weakening the people and presidencies the events were meant to strengthen.

3. The Multiplier Effect

A stake calendar cannot be assessed as though each entry affected only the small group that proposed it. Stake activity carries at least three multipliers: it propagates across wards, converges with other Church organizations in the household, and expands through preparation and recovery beyond the hours printed on the calendar.

The stake-to-ward multiplier

A ward activity consumes one ward's attention. A stake activity reaches into every participating ward at once. It may require promotion, registration, rides, equipment, adult supervision, presidency coordination, follow-up, and schedule adjustments in each unit. A single entry on the stake calendar therefore creates many local claims. The event is singular at its source but plural in its effects.

This makes a stake activity and a ward activity unequal units of institutional weight. The larger event may be appropriate; scale is sometimes the very reason for it. But scale also raises the burden of justification. When leaders count only the event and not its propagation, they understate what they are asking of wards and families.

The organization-to-household multiplier

Stake organizations do not serve independent constituencies. The same family is the common denominator. Consider a household with daughters, sons, a mother, and a Melchizedek Priesthood holder. The daughters may receive ward and stake Young Women invitations. The sons may receive quorum, ward, and stake Young Men invitations. The mother may have Relief Society, youth, Primary, or other responsibilities. The father may have elders quorum, ministering, bishopric, youth, temple, or stake assignments. Each organization may sincerely regard its own schedule as light. The family experiences the sum.

> *"Every time you schedule a youngster, you schedule a family—particularly the mother."*
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> —President Boyd K. Packer, "Parents in Zion"

The insight is not limited to mothers, though their hidden logistical labor is often greatest. A youth event schedules drivers, siblings, meals, gear, work arrangements, emotional preparation, and the family's shared rhythm. It may also schedule the parent who feels obligated to lead and the spouse who carries the household alone during the absence. One person appears on the roster; an entire household absorbs the claim.

Thus an event that is “only quarterly” to one stake organization can join quarterly events from several others, monthly ward events, weekly youth activity, camps, conferences, service projects, leadership meetings, and callings. Organizationally occasional can become domestically constant.

The duration multiplier

The printed start and end times rarely describe the full cost. A Thursday-through-Saturday activity may require planning meetings, shopping, packing, transportation, work adjustments, sleep recovery, cleaning equipment, and catching up on household responsibilities. It can alter four or five days of family life while occupying three calendar days. The right measure is not merely event duration; it is the total claim created by the event.

No single council sees this total automatically. Each organization can make a locally reasonable decision while the combined result becomes unreasonable. This is why coordination must be more than checking for identical dates. Leaders must view the whole calendar through the eyes of a representative household and ask what remains after all worthy claims are combined.

4. When Supplementation Becomes Competition

“Do not compete” can be read too narrowly. Two events need not occur at the same hour to compete. They can compete for preparation time, emotional attention, transportation, adult leadership, youth loyalty, family recovery, or the finite initiative of a quorum presidency. They can compete through sequence as well as simultaneity.

A stake program competes with a ward when it becomes the default around which the ward must plan. It competes with a quorum when it supplies the substance of the quorum’s activity life and leaves youth leaders chiefly to advertise, attend, or staff what others designed. It competes with the family when participation is formally optional but socially interpreted as the faithful choice.

This last form of competition is easy to miss because it is expressed warmly. “You should have been there” may be friendly, affectionate, and entirely free of accusation. Yet the word should communicates a norm. Repeated often enough—by admired leaders, peers, parents, and publicity—it turns an optional event into a practical expectation. Families and local leaders then bear the moral discomfort of declining something the institution says is optional but the culture treats as owed.

The Handbook directs that members not be made to feel obligated to attend every activity and that activities not become undue burdens (20.2.2). Genuine optionality is measured by the experience of declining. If a person who chooses a competing stewardship must explain or defend that choice, the event may be optional on paper but not in practice.

A BROADER TEST OF COMPETITION

The broader test of competition is therefore not merely whether a stake event conflicts with a ward calendar. It is whether the combined calendar competes for the family's time, the quorum's duty, and the local leader's capacity.

5. Stewardship Without Space

A calling can remain formally intact while the practical opportunity to fulfill it is taken away. This happens whenever a higher organization supplies decisions, programs, and expectations so completely that the local steward has little left to discern or govern. The leader still attends meetings, passes along information, and recruits participants. He or she may be busy while exercising less actual stewardship.

The Handbook's boundary for stake organizations guards against this condition. Their work is to instruct and support ward presidencies, not to perform ward or family assignments or create additional responsibilities for local leaders (6.7). Support should increase the recipient's ability to act. When it repeatedly replaces local action, it changes from strengthening to centralization.

The principle extends well beyond youth camps. A stake organization can unintentionally displace ward councils, elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies, Primary and Young Women presidencies, or parents by becoming the routine source of agendas, events, and solutions. The visible program may flourish while local revelatory capacity atrophies. The essential question is not who receives credit for the event, but whether the Lord's appointed steward still has meaningful work to do.

A deacons quorum illustration

A deacons quorum presidency provides a clear illustration because its authority is not decorative. The quorum president holds priesthood keys. Doctrine and Covenants 107:85 assigns him a duty to preside, sit in council, and teach quorum members. The Handbook gives quorum leaders responsibility to plan and carry out service and activities. Advisers help them learn their duty; advisers are not appointed to make every meaningful choice for them.

In the circumstance that prompted this essay, four stake Young Men camps have been placed on the calendar. The most recent ran from Thursday through Saturday. I have strong reason to believe that youth were not included in the decisions or planning, although I cannot present that conclusion as independently verified fact. I saw no indication of youth ownership communicated to the ward leaders and families asked to support the events. If youth did participate somewhere in the process, leaders should still ask whether that participation was early and substantial enough to constitute leadership rather than endorsement of an adult-made plan.

The difference matters because the Handbook says youth should lead the planning and execution of stake youth activities (29.3.9). The Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Camp Guide likewise tells advisers to let quorum presidencies lead and says young men should lead, plan, and direct as much as possible. Youth

needs, interests, family circumstances, and specific spiritual goals should shape the activity. These directions describe more than being invited, consulted after the principal decisions, or assigned portions of a program. They describe ownership appropriate to keys and calling.

Place beside that doctrine a polished stake activity whose dates, destination, adult structure, and recreation are already arranged. In the circumstance described here, the deacons quorum presidency was never asked whether the quorum should participate, whether the camp served a quorum need, or whether another use of the quorum's time was required. It was not given the option. The camp arrived as an already-set expectation. When I suggested that the presidency, under the deacons quorum president's keys, should prayerfully determine whether this camp, or any of the recurring camps, was what the quorum or a particular quorum member needed, the suggestion itself was treated as strange. That reaction is diagnostic. The stake program had already acquired priority; the presidency's presumed task was not to discern but to participate.

The young men may naturally be drawn to ready-made fun. But enjoyment does not establish that the presidency exercised its stewardship or that the activity answered a prayerfully identified need. Enthusiasm after adults have settled the substantive questions is not the same as youth leaders identifying needs, seeking inspiration, choosing the proper response, and accepting responsibility for the result.

The presidency may therefore keep its title and lose its duty. Agenda and discernment are transferred before the presidency ever enters the discussion. Leadership practice is reduced to promoting, attending, or staffing what others designed. Adults cannot later appeal to the boys' enjoyment as though it were a presidency decision that never occurred. Nothing is removed from the Handbook page or the calling certificate; what is removed is the circumstance in which the duty becomes necessary.

The example contains one established fact and one still-unverified question. The ward deacons quorum presidency was not asked whether the quorum should participate. Whether youth elsewhere were included in stake-level planning cannot be independently verified here. If no youth were included, the departure from the youth-led pattern is direct. If some were nominally included, leaders must still examine who originated the proposal, selected the organizational level, fixed the dates and purposes, controlled the resources, and retained the power to say no. The principle is that stake support should enlarge local stewardship, not merely place young people near adult decisions.

Camp guidance in its proper place

A fair reading must also acknowledge that the Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Camp Guide contemplates one multiday quorum camp each year where circumstances allow and says that “three to six other overnight activities are encouraged, if circumstances permit.” The number four therefore cannot, by itself, establish that a camping schedule is contrary to Church guidance.

That conditional permission is not a quota for stake-level camps or a presumption in favor of extended events. It sits inside guidance centered on quorum leadership, specific goals, individual needs, family circumstances, and evaluation. It must also be read with the General Handbook's direction that stakes plan youth activities occasionally, supplement rather than compete with wards, avoid burdens, and leave ward and family assignments where they belong.

Thus four stake Young Men camps in a year, with no stated purpose, are not condemned by arithmetic; they are a reason for careful review. Leaders should be able to explain why the stake rather than the wards or quorums must act, what distinct need each event meets, what youth actually decided and led, what household burden the series creates, and what local work remains. Exceptional circumstances may justify an unusual pattern. Scale, repetition, and duration increase the need for an explanation. Permission is not presumption.

A sentence worth hearing

As a deacons quorum adviser, I deliberately did not attend the recent camp. I did not decline in silence or from indifference. I deferred to the deacons quorum presidency I advise because their stewardship—not my desire for another adult-planned outing—was the duty I was trying to protect. I then watched the young men default to the easy, already-planned, enjoyable stake camp, not as the result of a presidency inquiry into quorum need, but because the event had already been established and surrounded with pressure toward prioritizing it.

A member of the stake Young Men presidency later approached me at a ward barbecue while I was speaking with the deacons quorum specialist. In a friendly, nonaccusatory tone, he said, "You should've been at the camp." I replied, "I absolutely should not have been—and neither should you have."

The second clause was not principally an accusation that this brother should have refused an assignment after the event had been approved. It was the more exact indictment: the program, as ordered, should not have created the claim upon either of us. My presence would have reinforced the transfer of initiative from the quorum presidency to the stake program. His expected presence reflected a structure that multiplied adult and ward obligations around an event whose necessity and purpose had not been stated.

A compressed sentence can carry more than its surface grammar. The Savior often taught with questions, parables, and sayings that required the hearer to seek, connect, and judge. "How readest thou?" was not an evasion of truth; it invited moral agency in finding it (Luke 10:26). A leader need not paint every implication for words to have meaning. Sometimes the effort required to procure understanding is part of the value of understanding.

That does not make every sharp sentence wise or every speaker correct. Discipleship requires humility on both sides. The speaker must be willing to have his claim tested against scripture, Handbook, and

fruits. The hearer must resist dismissing a true structural concern merely because it arrived in a form that demanded thought. The issue is not whether the exchange was rhetorically comfortable. The issue is whether our programs have begun to claim time and duty that the Lord assigned elsewhere.

6. The Household Is the Common Denominator

Return to the representative family: daughters, sons, a mother, and a Melchizedek Priesthood holder. Imagine that each youth organization plans only a few stake events, each ward organization plans only what appears normal, and each adult leader accepts a handful of overnight or weekend assignments. Every proposal can be defended separately. The household still experiences them together.

On one weekend a son camps and a father supervises. On another a daughter attends a conference and a mother serves. A ward social, presidency meeting, service activity, training, temple assignment, ministering visit, and Sunday responsibilities surround them. Packing and transportation precede the events; fatigue and deferred work follow them. The family may rarely be forbidden to gather. It may simply be scheduled out of gathering.

This is why the multiplier effect must be evaluated by a council with visibility across organizations. A Young Men presidency cannot protect the family calendar by looking only at Young Men. A Relief Society presidency cannot do it by looking only at Relief Society. Even a ward cannot see the effect if the stake calendar arrives as a set of fixed commitments from several organizations. The stake presidency and stake council are uniquely positioned to see the aggregate and to decide that some individually good proposals must yield.

President Packer warned that Church scheduling can burden an entire family and especially the mother. President Oaks taught that Church activities should not become so all-encompassing that families cannot be present together. President M. Russell Ballard urged leaders to focus on people and principles rather than embellishing programs until they sap time and strength. These teachings point to a common discipline: count the domestic cost, not merely the institutional event.

A CALENDAR IS A DOCTRINAL DOCUMENT WRITTEN IN HOURS

A calendar is a doctrinal document written in hours. What leaders repeatedly schedule reveals where they believe the Lord’s work occurs. A home-centered Church must be recognizable not only in teaching, but in the space its calendar leaves for the home to govern, worship, work, rest, and belong together.

7. A Council Test for Stake and Ward Activities

Before approving an activity—and again when reviewing the combined annual calendar—leaders should ask for revelation about the whole stewardship rather than about an attractive proposal in isolation.

1. Purpose. What specific spiritual or temporal need are we trying to meet? What result do we seek in people and families, and how will we recognize it?

2. Proper level. Why should this be done by the stake rather than by a ward, quorum, class, or family? What can the stake accomplish that the local steward reasonably cannot?

3. Preserved stewardship. After the stake supplies support, what meaningful duty remains for ward leaders and youth presidencies to discern, plan, lead, and evaluate?

4. Multiplier. How many wards, households, adult leaders, preparation hours, travel hours, and recovery days will this single calendar entry actually claim?

5. Representative family. What will the combined stake and ward calendar feel like to a household with sons, daughters, two adult callings, employment, school, home evening, extended family, and ordinary need for rest?

6. Practical optionality. Can a member decline without explanation, disappointment, loss of standing, or the suggestion that he or she should have attended? What language will leaders use before and after the event?

7. Substitution. What existing activity, meeting, or expectation will be reduced or removed if this is added? Are we supplementing a real need or merely accumulating good things?

8. Coordination. Have all stake organizations and affected wards viewed the same calendar, including duration and preparation—not simply checked for identical dates?

9. Review. Afterward, will we evaluate strengthened faith, family, and local leadership—or only attendance, enthusiasm, photographs, and requests to repeat the event?

These questions should be asked of recurring traditions with the same seriousness applied to new proposals. Longevity can hide the original purpose. Popularity can make review feel disloyal. Yet wise stewardship includes ending, shortening, localizing, or combining a good program when it no longer serves the higher order.

8. A Better Pattern of Stake Support

The alternative is not an empty calendar or isolated wards. It is a more exact use of stake strength. The stake can do what only the stake can do while deliberately enlarging the capacity of families, wards, quorums, and classes.

- Coordinate all organization calendars as one household-facing system, not as separate departmental schedules.
- Require every recurring stake event to state its need, purpose, organizational level, duration, youth leadership, family effect, and the local work it supplements.
- Favor fewer stake events with distinct purposes over a steady stream of attractive but interchangeable programs.
- Train and mentor ward leaders and youth presidencies, share equipment and safety expertise, and then return planning authority to them.
- When adding a substantial event, identify what will be shortened, canceled, or left to the ward so the total burden does not simply grow.
- Protect genuine agency by speaking of optional activities as optional before and after they occur.
- Measure success by increased faith, family strength, service, covenant keeping, and local leadership — not by the stake program's ability to reproduce itself.

For a deacons quorum, this might mean that stake leaders provide adviser training, a simple safety template, access to equipment, and examples of purposeful activity planning. The quorum presidency then counsels about its own members, speaks with parents, selects a goal, proposes an activity, and leads within appropriate adult supervision. A stake gathering can still occur when scale serves a distinct need. It should be recognizable as an exception that strengthens the local pattern, not the pattern that makes local leadership unnecessary.

Such restraint is not administrative timidity. It is confidence in keys and stewardships distributed throughout the Church. It trusts parents to govern their homes, bishops to know their wards, quorum and class presidencies to receive inspiration, and the stake to magnify rather than absorb those capacities.

Conclusion: Support That Leaves the Family Stronger

The question before Church leaders is not whether activities, meetings, conferences, camps, and programs can do good. They can. The question is whether the whole system of good things remains in the order the Lord has established.

The home is the center. The ward is the ordinary local setting. Quorum and class presidencies need real work through which to learn revelation and leadership. The stake supplies periodic strength, coordination, training, and resources that local units cannot efficiently provide. When the stake becomes the default activity provider, when "occasional" schedules multiply into a constant household claim, or when declining an activity requires defense, support has begun to compete.

A family's sacred time should not be treated as the unclaimed remainder of an institutional calendar. Nor should a deacons quorum presidency be praised for leading while adults remove the need to lead. The remedy is not suspicion toward every program. It is disciplined councils, stated purposes, honest aggregation, genuine optionality, and the courage to let some good things go.

Elder Bednar's principle is decisive: organizations and programs exist to bless individuals and families; they are not ends in themselves. The best evidence that a stake activity has supported the Lord's work is not that people attended it or asked for another. It is that families are stronger, wards are less burdened, and local presidencies are more—not less—capable of fulfilling the duties God entrusted to them.

Sources and Further Reading

All links below lead to official Church resources. Handbook references reflect the online General Handbook reviewed August 23, 2026.

General Handbook

2. Supporting Individuals and Families in the Work of Salvation and Exaltation — especially 2.2.4 and 2.3.

6. Stake Leadership — especially 6.7.

10. Aaronic Priesthood Quorums — quorum keys, responsibilities, family support, and activities.

11. Young Women — class leadership, family support, and activities.

20. Activities — purposes, planning, burdens, ward-level norm, and stake supplementation.

29. Meetings in the Church — especially 29.3.9.

Youth Camp Guidance

Camp Guide. Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Camp Guide: Methods—How — goals, youth leadership, family circumstances, annual camp, and additional overnights.

Camp Guide. Aaronic Priesthood Quorum Camp Guide: Other Resources — stake encampments, parent communication, youth direction, and evaluation.

Teachings of Church Leaders

Bednar. “Gather Together in One All Things in Christ,” October 2018 general conference Nelson. “Opening Remarks,” October 2018 general conference Oaks. “Good, Better, Best,” October 2007 general conference Oaks. “Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” October 2005 general conference Packer. “Parents in Zion,” October 1998 general conference Ballard. “O Be Wise,” October 2006 general conference Cook. “Adjustments to Strengthen Youth,” October 2019 general conference Burton. “The Sacred Keys of the Aaronic Priesthood,” April 2011 general conference Eyring. “A Priesthood Quorum,” October 2006 general conference Neider. “The Power of the Priesthood in the Boy,” April 2013 general conference

Scripture

Doctrine and Covenants. 107:85–88 — duties of Aaronic Priesthood quorum presidents. Doctrine and Covenants. 68:25–28 — parental responsibility. Mosiah. 4:27 — wisdom and order. Luke. 10:25–28 — a question that calls the hearer to read and judge.