
Orientation for ward council members

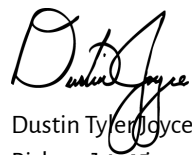
Welcome!

As a member of a ward organization presidency, you will hear about the “ward council” quite often. If you are a president, you will attend ward council meetings on a regular basis; if you are a counselor in a presidency, you may be asked to attend a ward council meeting in your organization president’s absence, and you will occasionally be invited to attend “extended” ward council meetings involving organization presidents *and* counselors.

I have assembled this information about ward councils in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in general and the Jamaica 1st Ward council in particular to assist you as you serve in your calling. Please read through it and let me know if you have any questions about this important aspect of administering our ward and the church.

Thank you once again for accepting your calling. I am personally grateful for your faith in Jesus Christ and your testimony of his restored gospel, and I am thankful for the opportunity I will have to serve alongside you. I know you and your family, as well as our ward, our community, and our church, will be richly blessed as you seek to magnify your calling, to serve the Lord, and to share God’s love with his children.

Sincerely,



Dustin Tyler Joyce
Bishop, Jamaica 1st Ward

What is the ward council?

The ward council consists of the bishopric and the presidents of ward organizations (elders quorum, Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School). It meets on a regular basis to discuss the needs of the ward and its members and to determine how ward organizations, activities, and programs can meet those needs.


More information about ward councils in the church can be found in section 29.2.5 of the church’s *General Handbook*, and instruction on councils in the church and their importance can be found in sections 4.3 and 4.4 of

the handbook. While the latest version of the *General Handbook* is available on the church’s website and in the Gospel Library app, I have included these sections (as they appeared in the August 2023 version of the handbook) as an addendum to this document.

Members of the ward council

While only organization presidents are considered members of the ward council, counselors should attend in their absence and are welcome to contribute equally when they do so.

Ward council meetings

 **Please add this to your calendar.** While we will try to remind you of ward council meetings, please note that they will still happen whether or not we remind you.

- 1st and 3rd Sundays
- 9.30–10.30am
- Bishop's office
- Only organization presidents need to attend. However, a counselor should attend if the president cannot.
- All attendees, men and women, regardless of organization, are equal members of the ward council and are welcome to speak up and contribute on any topic discussed by the ward council. In fact, some of the most valuable insights often come from those outside the organization(s) directly involved on a particular topic.
- “Ward organization leaders attend ward council meetings in two capacities: (1) As members of the ward council who help bless all ward members. (2) As representatives of their organizations” (*General Handbook*, 29.2.5).

Extended ward council meetings

About once a quarter we hold an extended ward council meeting, to which all members of organization presidencies — presidents and counselors — are invited.

Confidentiality

- Many items discussed in ward council should remain confidential. This is particularly true when discussing the needs of individual members and families in our ward, especially those receiving church assistance.
- This is also true when discussing potential callings for ward members. With the exception of the elders quorum, which operates under the priesthood keys held by the stake president, callings are approved and extended by members of the bishopric, not organization presidencies. In the past, some ward members have been offended when organization leaders discussed potential changes in callings with them without the involvement of the bishopric, and we would like to avoid such situations in the future.

Study the *General Handbook*

- You are encouraged to read section 29.2.5 of the church's *General Handbook*, which gives instruction on how ward council meetings should operate. This will help us all be on the same page with how our meetings should run.
- I also strongly encourage you to read the chapter of the handbook that discusses the organization you lead. In every case this includes specific instruction about the callings you hold.

Ward budget & quarterly report

All activities and related expenses of the Jamaica 1st Ward are paid for through the ward budget. (Building, utility, and cleaning expenses are not the ward's responsibility and are handled through the church's Facilities Management group.) The ward budget is provided by church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. The actual amounts allocated are determined by attendance in sacrament meeting and other ward meetings. The bishop oversees the ward budget and works with the ward council at the end of each calendar

year to determine ward budget allocations for the coming year.

The quarterly report

At the end of each calendar quarter, our ward submits a quarterly report. This report is submitted electronically to church headquarters by the ward clerk under the direction of the bishop. The data on the quarter report is provided by each of your organizations. As you keep accurate attendance and other records in your organizations in Leader and Clerk Resources on the

church's website or in the Member Tools mobile app, most of the information for the quarterly report will be automatically generated and entered. We will discuss the quarterly report further as we approach the end of each quarter.

The current ward budget is based on actual and projected quarterly allocations to the ward. These allocations are based on data we submit in our ward's quarterly reports. They are due on the 15th day of the month following the close of the quarter. For example, our ward's budget allocation for the 4th quarter is determined by the data on the quarterly report submitted 15 July:

| QUARTER | MONTHS | DUE |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1st | January, February, March | 15 April |
| 2nd | April, May, June | 15 July |
| 3rd | July, August, September | 15 October |
| 4th | October, November, December | 15 January (of the following year) |

Instructions from the handbook

You are encouraged to read section 34.6 in the *General Handbook* for instruction from our church leaders about budgets for local church units. However, there are a few specific instructions in that section we would like to point out here:

If necessary, leaders should reduce and simplify activities to stay within the allowance. Most activities should be simple and have little or no cost (34.6, introduction).

Funds should be used to bless people and to further gospel purposes. Leaders also ensure that all expenditures are within the allowance.

Stake and ward budget funds should be used to pay for all activities, programs, manuals, and supplies. Members should not usually pay

to participate in activities. Nor should they provide materials, supplies, rental or admission fees, or long-distance transportation at their own expense. Members may provide food if doing so is not a burden (see 20.6.1).

Members who want to contribute additional funds to the Church may not designate them for the stake or ward budget. Instead, leaders encourage them to contribute the funds to fast offerings, missionary funds, humanitarian aid, or other authorized donation categories. (34.6.2.2, emphasis added)

DO NOT use your own money for supplies for ward or organization activities without submitting a reimbursement. Not only is this in line with these instructions from our church leaders, but it also reduces the burden some members may feel that they would have to spend their own money if called into an organization presidency. We never want anyone to turn down a calling because they feel they can't afford to serve.

Reimbursements

While you can submit receipts to the ward clerk or assistant ward clerk, we encourage you to submit them directly through the Member Tools mobile app. You can do so through Finance > Payment Requests in the app's menu. We also encourage you to set up your Church Account so you can receive reimbursements electronically rather than by check. You can do so through the online Donations page on the church's website.

Questions?

If you have any questions about any of this, please reach out to our ward clerk, Brother Chunielal. If needed, we can also discuss the ward budget and existing allocations in an upcoming ward council meeting.

Protecting Children and Youth

As you know, our church and its leaders take very seriously keeping children and youth safe and protecting them from any and all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse. This is especially a concern in a church setting when youth are interacting with adult leaders and teachers.

To help all of us understand the role we play in protecting and supporting children and youth in this way, the church asks members serving in particular callings to complete an online training every three years. Please pay particular attention to whether you and those in your organization have completed this training. If you have not, or if anyone serving in your organization has not, please do so as soon as possible.

It is important to note that the training is valid for three years. It was introduced in 2019, so many of us who completed it then will need to do so again in the coming months. We invite you to be proactive in making sure your completion status for the training remains valid.

This training can be completed at **protectingchildren.churchofjesuschrist.org**. Members will need an online Church Account — a login for the church's website connected to their church membership record number — to complete it. Please see the ward clerk or assistant ward clerk if you or someone in your organization needs assistance with this.

In short, adults should never be left alone with youth or children without another adult present. It requires some diligence to make sure two adults are present in every situation, but protecting these children and youth from the potential for abuse — and protecting those serving in the church from misunderstanding or compromising situations — is worth it.

Very rare exceptions to this policy exist. One is in ministering. As ministering assignments for youth ages 14 and older are made, it is important that parents/guardians be informed of and approve these assignments.

The other is in interviews. However, the *General Handbook* instructs:

Always give the member the option of having someone else be present during an interview or meeting. When meeting with a member of the opposite sex, a child, or a youth, ensure that a parent or another adult is present. He or she may join the meeting or wait outside the room, depending on the preferences of the member with whom you are meeting. (31.1.4)

The option to have another person present applies to everyone — men and women, adults and youth — in all situations. We need to ensure that all members are aware of this option, and that they are comfortable in interviews and find them uplifting.

Presidency meetings

The *General Handbook* instructs that presidencies should meet “regularly”. A good rule of thumb is that when the handbook says “regularly” it probably means at least monthly. In our ward, that is the standard we have set: **please meet as a presidency at least monthly**, but it is likely you will need to hold meetings more often.

The location, format, and schedule of these meetings is up to you as a presidency. You may meet in person or online. (If you meet online, the ward has a Zoom account you can use which will allow you longer meetings than the time limit Zoom imposes on free accounts.) However, we strongly offer two recommendations:

- **These should be actual meetings.** In the past organization presidencies have reported that they stay in touch with each other only as needed via text and other means. While this can be a great supplement, especially in between presidency meetings — you *should* stay in consistent contact with each other — this is not a substitute for meetings held on a regular basis with all members of your presidency and your organization secretary (if one is called).
- **Set a regular schedule for these meetings.** For example, the bishopric meets every Sunday morning; ward council meets in person on 1st and 3rd Sundays from 9.30 to 10.30am.

The bishopric will request to be informed of your presidency's meeting schedule. This will allow members of the bishopric to participate in your meetings as needed and, if you plan to meet via Zoom, it will help us make sure the account is not double booked.

It is usually not necessary to cancel a presidency meeting if a presidency member or secretary can't attend due to a conflict. However, if a presidency member or secretary consistently has work, family, or other commitments that prevent them from attending meetings, you may want to consider changing your

meeting schedule. The goal is for as many to be involved and contributing as consistently as possible.

In addition to discussing organization business and how to meet the needs of organization members, presidency meetings provide a valuable opportunity for ongoing training in your callings. We encourage you to incorporate a brief training into each of your presidency meetings. Some simple ideas for ongoing training include:

- Reading through a short section of the *General Handbook* relating to your organization or another aspect of church service.
- Inviting a member of your presidency to share a brief training.
- Viewing videos and reviewing other materials related to your organization and calling at [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/callings](https://www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/callings).

Presidency meetings do not need to be long or overly formal to be effective (but they cannot be effective if they don't happen, and presidencies are unlikely to be effective if they don't meet). Look to the *General Handbook* for more instruction about your and your organization's responsibilities and topics of discussion for your meetings.

Additional instruction from the *General Handbook*

What is the *General Handbook*?

The primary sources of instruction as we serve in our callings are the Lord's words in the scriptures and as given through modern prophets and apostles. These important instructions are supplemented by a *General Handbook*, prepared under the direction of the First Presidency and other church leaders. The *General Handbook* provides up-to-date information on particular church policies and procedures and practical instruction on how to apply scriptural and prophetic direction to our service in church callings.

Within the past few years, the *General Handbook* has become entirely digital. It is available on the church's

website and in the Gospel Library app. This allows the handbook to be updated much more quickly with changes in church policy, procedure, and terminology than was possible in the past with printed handbooks.

The handbook is divided into numbered chapters, sections, and subsections to make it easier to find and reference instruction on various topics. For example, the following excerpt is from 29.2.5 of the handbook:

Chapter 29, Meetings in the Church

Section 2, Ward Meetings

Subsection 5, Ward Council Meeting

29.2.5

Ward Council Meeting

PURPOSE

Help accomplish God's work of salvation and exaltation in the ward (see 1.2).

PARTICIPANTS

- The bishopric, ward clerk, and ward executive secretary.
- Presidents of the elders quorum, Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and Sunday School.

The bishop may invite others to attend, such as the ward mission leader, the ward temple and family history leader, the leaders of the ward young single adult committee, the ward music coordinator, and the full-time missionaries.

FREQUENCY

Usually weekly (but may meet less often).

The bishop plans, presides over, and conducts ward council meetings. If he is absent, he may assign a counselor to preside and conduct. However, the council does not make major decisions without the bishop.

The ward council seeks to help all ward members build spiritual strength, receive saving ordinances, keep covenants, and become consecrated followers of Jesus Christ (see Moroni 6:4–5). During ward council meetings, council members plan and coordinate this work. They determine together how the strengths and abilities of ward members can bless those in need. They seek the guidance of the Spirit as they unite in love and concern for members of the ward.

Ward organization leaders attend ward council meetings in two capacities:

1. As members of the ward council who help bless all ward members.
2. As representatives of their organizations.

When they meet together, ward council members discuss matters that would benefit from unified efforts of the entire council. Each council member is encouraged to share his or her thoughts and inspiration on these matters.

Ward council meetings usually do not last longer than one hour. They begin with a prayer and brief reports on assignments from previous meetings. Listed below are items that could be discussed. There is not enough time to discuss

all of them in every meeting. The bishop gives priority to matters that are most needed to bless individuals and families.

- *Living the gospel of Jesus Christ.* Helping all members build faith, receive saving ordinances, and keep their covenants.
- *Caring for those in need.* Sharing resources and skills to bless individuals, families, and the community. Helping ward members become self-reliant. (See chapter 22.)
- *Inviting all to receive the gospel.* Reviewing the progress of those who are learning about the gospel, as well as new and returning members. Discussing ways members can share the gospel with others. (See chapter 23.)
- *Uniting families for eternity.* Reviewing the progress of members who are preparing to receive temple ordinances. Planning ways to help more members qualify for a temple recommend. Discussing ways members can participate in temple and family history work. (See chapter 25.)

As ward council members discuss these matters, they consider the needs and strengths of the members they serve. They can learn about these needs and strengths in presidency meetings, in discussions with members of their organization (including ministering interviews), and through their own ministering efforts. In addition, Leader and Clerk Resources has tools and reports that can help leaders be aware of the progress of members. Council members must keep confidential any private or sensitive information (see 4.4.6).

The ward council should know the children and youth in the ward and their home circumstances. They pay particular attention to those who do not have gospel support at home.

After a discussion, the bishop may either decide on a course of action or postpone a decision while seeking additional information and guidance. Or he could refer the matter to a different council, such as the bishopric. See 4.4.3.

Sometimes the ward council may determine that a ward activity could help meet the needs of members. The ward council may oversee the planning of ward activities. However, most of the planning is done before and after council meetings. For more information about activities, see chapter 20.

After full-time missionaries return home, they may be invited to report on their missions to the ward council (see 24.8.3).

To understand principles that guide council meetings in the Church, all council members should study 4.3 and 4.4.

4.3

Councils in the Church

Heavenly Father has established councils as an important part of receiving inspiration, making decisions, and accomplishing His work. Councils existed before the world was created. Each of us participated in these councils before coming to earth. (See Doctrine and Covenants 121:32; Abraham 3:22–28.)

Following this pattern, the Church of Jesus Christ is governed by councils at every level. For example, the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see 5.1.1.1), Area Presidencies (see 5.2.1), stake presidencies, and bishoprics are all councils. In addition to stake and ward councils, each presidency of a Church organization, quorum, or class is also a council.

The Lord has instructed the leaders of His Church to counsel together in doing His work (see Doctrine and Covenants 41:2–3). Councils provide opportunities for council members to receive revelation as they seek to understand the needs of God's children and plan how to help meet them.

4.4

Principles of Effective Councils

Some principles of effective councils are outlined in this section.

4.4.1

Purposes of Councils

The primary purpose of councils is to help members work together in seeking divine guidance about matters that will bless individuals and families (see Doctrine and Covenants 43:8–9). Councils give special emphasis to helping members receive ordinances and keep the associated covenants. Council members also seek inspiration about planning and coordinating the Lord's work in their area of responsibility.

Some administrative business, such as calendar planning, may not require discussion in a council setting. Much of this can be handled through communication before and after meetings.

Council members give particular care to individuals and families with pressing needs. Councils help coordinate assistance. For information about some of these needs, along with resources for understanding and assisting, see Life Help in the Gospel Library.

4.4.2

Preparation for Council Meetings

Presidencies and councils are expected to meet regularly. Leaders seek the Lord's guidance in planning council meetings. They also seek input from council members in deciding what to discuss.

Leaders let council members know of the matters for discussion in advance. Council members prepare to share insights about these matters. For ward and stake councils, much of this preparation occurs in presidency meetings.

Council members prepare themselves spiritually to participate in council meetings.

4.4.3

Discussion and Decisions

The Lord said, "Let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:122). This principle applies to Church councils.

During a council meeting, the leader (or someone the leader assigns) explains the matter being considered. The leader then encourages discussion among all council members, asking questions and seeking ideas.

The leader encourages members to speak openly and honestly. The diverse backgrounds, ages, experiences, and viewpoints of council members enrich the council. Members share suggestions and listen to each other respectfully. As they seek to know the Lord's will, a spirit of inspiration and unity can prevail.

In a council that includes women and men, the leader seeks insights and ideas from both. Women and men often have different perspectives that provide needed balance. Men and women reach better decisions and have greater success in the Lord's service as they value each other's contributions and work together.

A leader guides the council's discussions. However, he or she should listen more than talk. When a council leader shares his or her perspective too early, it can inhibit the contributions of others. When necessary, the council leader gently redirects or refocuses the discussion.

After the discussion, the leader may either decide on a course of action or postpone a decision while seeking additional information and guidance. The decision should be informed by the discussion and confirmed by the Spirit. The council process helps bring about inspired decisions that go beyond a

leader's own best judgment. The leader may also refer the matter to a different council.

Sometimes council members may have unsettled feelings about an important decision. When this happens, the leader may wait for another meeting to consider the matter further and seek spiritual confirmation and unity. In some cases, a council member may want to meet with the leader individually to discuss his or her concerns.

4.4.4

Unity

The Lord instructed His disciples to “be one” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:27). Council members seek to become one in desire and purpose with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. They strive for unity in their discussions and decisions.

Council members should avoid contention, unrighteous judgment, and gossip (see 3 Nephi 11:28–30). As they act in unity, Heavenly Father will bless their efforts.

4.4.5

Action and Accountability

Council members do most of their work before and after council meetings. During meetings, they seek inspiration in developing plans to implement decisions. The council leader invites members to fulfill assignments relating to these plans. Council members usually invite others in their organization to help. Individuals should not be overburdened with assignments.

Council members report on their assignments. Progress usually requires sustained attention and follow-up assignments.

4.4.6

Confidentiality

Leaders use discretion when sharing personal information with a council. They generally seek a member's permission to share this information.

The council respects the desires of any who request confidentiality. Council members should not share personal information outside the council unless required to fulfill an assignment from the council leader.

Some matters are too sensitive to bring before an entire council. As appropriate, leaders review these matters with individual members of the council. Or they may refer some matters to a different council.