

The Importance of Wood Badge Training



Comments by
Charles W. Dahlquist, II
Young Men General
President

It is vital that we, as Priesthood and Aaronic Priesthood/Young Men leaders take training seriously. We are part of this great partnership with Boy Scouts of America for very specific reasons: If we fully

participate, our young men will be blessed and better prepared for missions and for the blessings of the temple. Part of the participation is training – especially Wood Badge training.

If we are really intent in touching the lives of our young men, in building, as Elder Ballard has challenged, “the greatest generation of missionaries this world has ever seen,” then we will do whatever is necessary to help us to accomplish that – including getting trained. For most of us, Wood Badge is life-changing because it has to do more with vision and understanding this great tool for strengthening young men of the Aaronic Priesthood than anything else.

Why do we think that we do not need to be trained in that program which the Church has espoused for nearly 100 years as the “activity arm of the Aaronic Priesthood?” The reason why Scouting training is vital is that, by and large, we do a very poor job in training the leaders we call to Aaronic Priesthood/Young Men callings – and yet expect them to work miracles in the lives of their young men. One of the great blessings of our partnership with Scouting is the marvelous training that is provided.

The call is for every leader, including stake presidency members working with youth, high councilors, stake Young Men presidents, Bishoprics, ward Young Men leaders and Scouting leaders, to be trained. By my count that is, at the least, 7-10 per ward and 50-75 per stake. I know companies that don’t even allow a new employee to step into the plant or office until he has received initial training. They do that because they know that, without training, most individuals will be ineffective in the job they were hired to do. And yet, we call leaders to strengthen, motivate and prepare young men for missionary service and life in general – without one iota of training.

In contrast to that, I know one bishop who has 17 Wood Badge trained leaders in his ward. Imagine the strength of their youth programs. I was in another ward the other day – a new ward with little Scout tradition. I was there because my grandson, now 11 years old, was getting his Second Class and First Class badges. As I spoke with a member of the bishopric after the Court of Honor, he

indicated that their entire Scouting team -- Bishopric, Young Men presidency and Scouting leaders -- were heading to Wood Badge within the year. I can only imagine what a great blessing that will be to the boys those leaders serve. INSTEAD OF WORRYING ABOUT ONE PERSON FROM A WARD AND TWO PERSONS FROM A STAKE ATTENDING WOOD BADGE -- WHY DON’T WE JUST COMMIT TO GET EVERY LEADER TRAINED, INCLUDING FAST START, YOUTH PROTECTION, BASIC TRAINING AND WOOD BADGE IMMEDIATELY AFTER THEY ARE CALLED. Once a priesthood leader makes that type of an investment in the training of a leader, he will be less likely to release him after 6 months of faithful service -- but will leave him in long enough to have a positive effect in the life of a boy.

One final thought. With some exceptions, generally the best Duty to God progress is made in those units that also have vibrant Scouting programs. The lessons we have learned for effective achievement programs in Scouting are the same that will make Duty to God effective. I seldom see a ward or stake that has a vibrant, exciting, building Duty to God program that does not also have a great Scouting program.

Not long ago, I spoke with a ward Young Men leader who was excited about the Duty to God program they had for their priests. “One week we have one mission president come and talk to the boys about this subject, and the next week, we have a returned missionary come and talk about that subject, . . . etc.” I asked, “Are they all lecture/discussions in the Church building?” “Yes,” was the answer. “And do they constitute your full activity program for priests, except for joint activities?” Again the answer was “Yes.” Then I asked, “And are your priests excited about what you are doing?” After some reflection, this Young Men president said, “You know, they really aren’t. We are having a very hard time getting them to attend.” Had this leader been to Wood Badge, he would have learned early that when you take the “fun” and youth involvement out of youth programs – most of the youth take themselves out as well.

Scouting teaches us how to build character and spiritual depth in our young men, and how to help them become involved in service and making a difference in the lives of others – while they are having fun.

I, personally, am grateful for the effect of my own personal attendance at Wood Badge at Camp Maple Dell nearly 25 years ago. I may not remember how to make a woggle, but I can still recall my feelings experienced during the training – it was life changing for me.

To learn more about Wood Badge training and how you can attend, contact your local Scout Office.

