

6: Sustaining Those Whom the Lord Sustains

Monte F. Shelley

1. What does it mean to sustain someone?

OED *Sustain*, v. 1. To support the efforts, conduct, or cause of; to succor, support, back up. 3. To keep ... [one] from failing or giving way.

Jeffrey R. Holland: It is no small thing to “sustain” another person. The word literally means to “uphold” or, if you prefer, to “hold up.” When we sustain life, we nourish it, we keep it going. When we sustain a friend or a neighbor or a stranger in the street, we give support, we share strength, we provide help. We hold each other up under the weight of present circumstance. We bear one another’s burdens under the heavy personal pressures of life. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1989)

2. When do we manifest that we sustain leaders?

⁶⁵ No person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church; (D&C 20:65)

² All things shall be done by common consent in the church. ... (D&C 26:2; 28:13)

We sustain people when first called to a position.

“[Name] has been called as [position], and we propose that he [or she] be sustained. Those in favor may manifest it by the uplifted hand. [Pause briefly for the sustaining vote.] Those opposed, if any, may manifest it. [Pause briefly to allow for a dissenting vote, if any.]” (Handbook #2)

Who do we sustain in General Conference? Apostles as _____?

It is proposed that we sustain [name] as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; [name] as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and [name] as Second Counselor in the First Presidency.

Those in favor may manifest it. Any opposed may do so.

It is proposed that we sustain ... [names of each member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles]

Those in favor, please manifest it. Any who may be opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators.

All in favor, please indicate.

Who do we sustain at Stake and Ward Conferences?

Who do we sustain in Temple Recommend interviews?

4. Do you sustain the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator and as the only person on the earth who possesses and is authorized to exercise all priesthood keys? Do you sustain members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators? Do you sustain the other General Authorities and local authorities of the Church?

What are acceptable reasons for opposing or dissenting vote?

Joseph Fielding Smith: “I have no right to raise my hand in opposition to a man who is appointed to any position in this Church, simply because I may not like him, or because of some personal disagreement or feeling I may have, but only on the grounds that he is guilty of wrong doing, of transgression of the laws of the Church which would disqualify him for the position which he is called to hold.” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:123–124)

If a member in good standing gives a dissenting vote when someone is presented to be sustained, the presiding officer or another assigned priesthood officer confers with the dissenting member in private after the meeting. The officer determines whether the dissenting vote was based on knowledge that the person who was presented is guilty of conduct that should disqualify him or her from serving in the position. (Handbook)

3. Those who preside over the Church (GAS)

Joseph Smith did not choose himself to be President of the Church. Neither did any who followed him. ... The appointment comes from our Heavenly Father through His inspiration

This great Church has been presided over by men who have been specially prepared, specially taught, specially equipped for that high honor that has been conferred upon each as he has taken his place. Our Heavenly Father in his wisdom has surrounded these leaders of Israel with others who like themselves have faith and who do not bow to the individual because of his personality or individuality as president of the Church, but who recognize him as the mouthpiece of our Heavenly Father and sustain him and uphold him and pray for him, and love him, in order that they, too, may receive the blessings of our Heavenly Father.

4. What does it mean to sustain the president? (GAS)

A: George Albert Smith was sustained as President of the Church in general conference in October 1945. ... [He said,] “I thank you for the confidence that has been manifested ... in hoping that I may succeed, and promising ... that you will help me to succeed, because I am only a man, one of the humblest among you, but I have been called to this service ... by the authority of our Heavenly Father. ... I will need the help of ... [everyone], not for my blessing, but for your blessing, and for the blessing of the children of men wherever they may be. That is not *my* responsibility, that is *our* responsibility.”

How many of you remember President Smith?

B: Let us sustain these men whom God has raised up to preside over us. Let us bless them, not only by our lips, but by assisting in every possible way to carry this burden that rests so heavily upon their shoulders. ... Pray for and bless them and help them.

C: It does not mean that we will go quietly on our way and be willing that the prophet of the Lord shall direct this work, but it means ... that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; we will defend his good name, and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct him to offer them to us while he remains in that position.

D: When I think of the burdens that are carried by the President of this Church and his counselors, and realize the responsibilities that are placed upon their shoulders, with all my heart I desire to help them, that I may not be an encumbrance, but that in the position to which I have been called, with you, my brethren and my sisters, we may each take our place and carry our portion of the load and magnify our calling to the honor and glory of God.

E: I know [the General Authorities] are servants of the Lord, and ... they are seeking to bless mankind. I hope that not any of you ... will fail to sustain them, not only by your faith and prayers but if they are misrepresented ..., that you may be willing and anxious to defend them, if need be, because there is a time coming when they will need your defense. ... Evil men speak evil of them, and good men and good women speak well of them.

No evil speaking of the Lord’s anointed.

F: God grant that we who have been so bountifully blessed may hold up the hands of the servant of the Lord who presides over us; that we may help him not only by our faith and prayers but by loving kindness as opportunity offers; that we may march under the banner that he shall hold aloft as God continues to sustain him as President of the Church, as the prophet of the Lord.

5. Ignoring and criticizing leaders (GAS)

A: There are those ... who have been blinded by the philosophies and foolishness of men. There are those who reject the advice and counsel of the man that God has placed at the head of this Church. ... People who haven't very much information suddenly come along with a bright idea, and they suggest "this is the way" or "that is the way," and although it is in conflict with the advice of the Lord some are persuaded to try it. The Lord has given safe advice and appointed the President of his Church to interpret that advice. If we ignore what he advises, as the President of the Church, we may discover that we have made a serious mistake.

B: The Presidency of the Church ... are the representatives of our Heavenly Father. ... We would do well if we would magnify and honor these men he has placed at our head. They are men with human frailties, they will make mistakes, but if we will be as charitable to the mistakes that they make as we are to our own failures and mistakes, we will see their virtues as we see our own. I ... plead with you ... not to permit words of criticism or of unkindness to pass your lips about those whom the Lord has called to lead us. Do not be found in the companionship of those who would belittle them or weaken their influence among the children of men. If you do, I can say to you that you will find yourselves in the power of the adversary.

C: If the members of this Church who find fault with the leaders of the Church and criticize those who are giving their very lives to bless and benefit us would only pause long enough to ask prayerfully, "Which of these teachers is it safe to follow?" they would have no difficulty in finding their right course and would sustain those whom the Lord sustains.

D: [Church members] have prayed for and sustained their leaders ... and during my experience in the Church I have yet to know of one person who has been observing the commandments of the Lord who has raised his or her voice against those who were called to preside over this Church.

6. Who do we covenant to obey?

Temple and sacrament covenants to obey God's commandments. We agree to hearken to the counsel of those who preside over us as they hearken unto the Lord. We covenant to obey God, not man

7. What if we reject God's counsel given by a servant?

⁶ The thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. ... ⁷ And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people ...: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Sam 8:6-7)

I asked Elder Packer about a BYU professor who disagreed publicly with the brethren. He answered with the following:

¹⁴ The day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; ¹⁵ For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant; ¹⁶ They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god. (D&C 1:14-16)

8. How can we know a leader's counsel is from God?

Brigham Young: What a pity it would be if we were led by one man to utter destruction! ... I am more afraid that this people have so much confidence in their leaders that they will not inquire for themselves of God whether they are led by [God]. I am fearful they settle down in a state of blind self-security, trusting their eternal destiny in the hands of their leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God in their salvation, and weaken that influence they could give to their leaders, did they know for themselves, by the revelations of Jesus, that they are led in the right way. Let every man and woman know, by the whispering of the Spirit of God to themselves, whether their leaders are walking in the path the Lord dictates, or not. This has been my exhortation continually. (JD 9:150)

Joseph F. Smith (Sept. 3, 1892): Concerning the question of blind obedience. Not a man in this Church, since the Prophet Joseph Smith down to the present day, has ever asked any man to do as he was told blindly. No Prophet of God, no Apostle, no President of a Stake, no Bishop, who has had the spirit of his office and calling resting upon him, has ever asked a soul to do anything that they might not know was right and the proper thing to do. We do not ask you to do anything that you may not know it is your duty to do, or that you may not know will be a blessing for you to do. If we give you counsel, we do not ask you to obey that counsel without you knowing that it is right to do so. But how shall we know that it is right? By getting the Spirit of God in our hearts, by which our minds may be opened and enlightened, that we may know the doctrine for ourselves, and be able to divide truth from error, light from darkness and good from evil. (*Collected Discourses*, Vol. 3)

Missionaries invite people to ask God to get a 2nd witness.

D. Todd Christofferson: Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such." President Clark ... observed: ... "During the excitement incident to the coming of [Johnston's] Army, Brother Brigham preached to the people in a morning meeting a sermon vibrant with defiance to the approaching army, and declaring an intention to oppose and drive them back. In the afternoon meeting he arose and said that Brigham Young had been talking in the morning, but the Lord was going to talk now. He then delivered an address, the tempo of which was the opposite from the morning talk. ... The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost'; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest." (*Ensign*, Apr 2012)

How did Lehi's sons respond to his dream to leave Jerusalem?

¹² Laman and Lemuel ... did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God. ... ¹³ Neither did they believe that Jerusalem ... could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. ... ¹⁶ I, Nephi, ... did cry unto the Lord; and ... he did visit me, and did soften my heart that I did believe all the words ... spoken by my father; wherefore, I did not rebel against him like unto my brothers. ¹⁷ And I spake unto Sam, making known unto him the things which the Lord had manifested unto me by his Holy Spirit. And ... he believed in my words. (1 Ne 2:12-17)

9. When have saints disagreed with modern prophets?

- **Joseph Smith:** Many found fault with Joseph and apostatized
- **Polygamy:** (beginning and ending)
- **Prohibition amendment:** Voting contrary to the counsel of Church leaders, Utah's vote to repeal the prohibition amendment was the last one required to repeal it.
- **Blacks and the priesthood:** (denied then receive) (Larry)
Before the revelation on priesthood, local leaders in the south were asked what they thought about missionary work to the blacks and integrated meetings? Many strongly opposed.
After the revelation, some members refused to take the sacrament from a black deacon.
- **Gays and Lesbians:** Proposition 8 in California
- **Political statements:** Socialism, government welfare, proper role of government.
- **Men called as local leaders.** In some branches/wards attendance depends on which clan/tribe the bishop was from.

10. When and how should disagreements be expressed?

Pharisees had many rules of conduct that went beyond the law to create "a hedge around the Law" to render its infringement or modification impossible." Christ taught correct principles and obeyed God's will (e.g., healed on the Sabbath) even if it was contrary to their rules or teachings. When they found fault with him, he quoted the Law and the Prophets which was the official handbook. (OT-I Effects of Exile)

Could there be modern "Pharisees" in the Church teaching rules that go beyond official guidelines? Word of Wisdom, fasting, ...?

Was Jethro sustaining the prophet Moses when he said:

¹⁷ The thing that thou doest is not good. ... ¹⁹ Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: ... ²¹ Provide out of all the people able men ... to be rulers of thousands, ... hundreds, ... fifties, and ... tens. (Ex 18:17-21)

Moral: Discuss privately. Thou shalt take ... Hiram Page, between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written ... are not of me. (D&C 28:11)

Often the brethren have strong disagreements while an issue is being discussed. The discussion continues until all agree.

Bill Flake: A senior missionary arrive 5 minutes late to a distant branch in Jamaica and saw the members doing jumping jacks. When he asked why, the branch president said, "The handbook says, start the meeting with opening exercises."

Bill Flake: At a Sunday morning council meeting, the branch president asked a member to go buy some refreshments for the fireside that night. The senior missionary said "we don't buy on Sundays" and then explained why. The president listened and later in Sacrament meeting gave a 5 minute talk on the subject.

Moral #2: Leaders and members make the BEST CHOICE available at the time.

Available depends on knowing better and practicing.

11. What if we cannot do all we are counseled to do?

An evaluation of amount of time required of a bishop to do everything the old church handbooks that he could not delegate was 80 hours a week. Changes were made.

The list of good things to do is greater than we can do.

A woman had 2 year old triplets and 4 other children between 4 and 10. The triplets needed a diaper change. The triplets pulled clothes out of drawers, clogged the toilet with a diaper, and spilled a bag of flour on the floor. Mom was trying to make a lunch for her husband and get breakfast. After her husband left, mom was trying to make bread for a Relief Society social, answer several phone calls, and pick up after the children. Just as the visiting teachers rang the doorbell, one of the triplets toddled into the kitchen dragging a soggy diaper from one foot.

The visiting teachers gave a lesson "about how LDS women ought to be running their homes. They read off some list ... [that LDS] mothers should keep their homes clean, have an attractive and peaceful atmosphere, prepare nutritional meals, have beautiful table settings, start stimulating conversations during meals, sew and quilt ... , study the scriptures thirty minutes a day, spend thirty minutes a day on their knees, keep a daily journal, attend the temple twice a month, do genealogical research, write letters regularly to missionaries ... , get adequate rest, do thirty minutes of exercise ... , be beautiful, teach their children the gospel, teach them to be honest, obedient, industrious, talented, clean, healthy, safe, ... creative, and teach them to clean their teeth. ... In addition they should support their PTA [and] political party. ... They should develop their own talents ... read good literature, ... listen to ... their children, ... [have each child] learn to play an instrument, and ... [be] active in the seasonal sports programs. In addition, they should greet their husband at the door each evening looking as fresh and exciting as a morning daisy.

When they finished reading, ... [mom was] all red and purple. ... [After they left] I heard mom crying." (Blaine and Brenton Yorgason, *A Town Called Charity*, 17-23)

12. What if we disagree with a leader's counsel?

It is easy to follow counsel that we agree with immediately.

CCR: Bishop asked him to guard the door to keep a person from entering and to throw him out if necessary.

What if we do not get a second witness from the Spirit?

Consult Church Handbook or talk with leader over that leader.

Lennis Knighton, area president, and Neal A. Maxwell story.

Scout camp: A Stake president does not allow a FHE exception for Scout Camp even though an exception is expressly stated in the Church handbooks. This prevents boys from attending the first day of camp or requires leaders schedule only camps close enough to return home in time for FHE and then return to camp.

Time before Sacrament Meeting: My son said his stake president asked ward leaders and members to come to sacrament meeting 15 minutes early and sit quietly, listen to prelude music, and prepare spiritually to take the sacrament. My son said it was hard enough to keep his young children quiet during sacrament meeting without adding another 15 minutes. I sent him the following statement from Handbook #2.

The bishopric and the speakers should be in their seats at least five minutes before the meeting begins. ... The bishopric encourages families to arrive on time and to sit together. (Handbook #2, 18.2.2)

Todd Goodsell: A US Bishop insisted that auxiliaries suggest a name for each vacant position in their organizations and then called someone else without consulting or informing them before they were sustained. He later explained that if I approved a name you submitted, I would not be calling the person, you would. My friend discussed this with the Stake President who later had a training session on calling people in a bishopric training meeting.

Great leaders recognize that inspired ideas do not all originate in them. Feedback and suggestions from employees and customers are the source of many great ideas and programs. (Bill Marriot)

¹⁷ In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:17).

Leaders should not accept or reject ideas from members without a 2nd witness. This is one reason for councils.

Todd Goodsell: A ward in his mission insisted that no one be in the chapel when the Aaronic priesthood set up or took down the sacrament. [Since these were wards, missionary were told not to correct anyone. Correction and training was to come through the stake not the mission.]

13. What if a leader exercises unrighteous dominion?

³⁹ We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. (D&C 121:39)

Elder Larry Y. Wilson: A month or so after we were married, my wife and I were taking a long road trip in the car. She was driving, and I was trying to relax. I said, “You’re going too fast. Slow down.” My new bride ... replied, “What gives you the right to tell me how to drive?” ... I said, “... because I’m your husband and I hold the priesthood.” Brethren, ... that is *not* the right response. And ... it was the one and only time I ever made that mistake. (Ensign, May 2012)

How did his wife respond?

How did her response help him learn to be a good husband?

Was she sustaining him? Feedback and suggestions help!

Abusive husband: After his temple marriage, a man believes his wife must obey him without question. When she does not, he feels that he can say and do very unkind things until she does obey. I feel his methods are spouse abuse. Somehow he denies that there is “anything in [his] conduct relating to members of [his] family that is not in harmony with the teachings of the Church.” With his current recommend in hind, he wants he wife to go to the temple to renew her vows to obey him.

Pay back tithing: A bishop refused to give a temple recommend to a convert so he could be sealed to his wife until he had paid his tithing even on earnings before he was baptized. (Snuffer, 320)

Missionary: A missionary told his mission president that required minimum street contacting hours were not working. The president dismissed his concerns, accused him of not ‘sustaining’ him as a leader, and demanded the elder return his temple recommend. (Snuffer, 320–321).

“The Church is destined to succeed through inviting, not through demanding. It is intended to prosper through love, not through intimidation. ... Well-intended Latter-day Saint bullies can never help the Church.” (Snuffer, 319)

Such methods drive people away from the church.

Conclusion

“You do have a responsibility to sustain and uphold the presiding authorities of the Church. We need them. They are entrusted with the management of the affairs of the Church. They are entitled to our support, our prayers and our listening ear. We tune them out at great risk, at the peril of our own salvation. They are given to us as gifts, even though they are frail mortals. We judge them with the standard by which we will be judged. Therefore, our standard for them should show such charity as to set a standard of judgment we could also pass. I would recommend, therefore, you view Church leaders with affection, tolerance and forgiveness.” (Snuffer, 326–327)

Read first Quote below

May we sustain the servants of the Lord by seeking to know and do the will of the Lord.

Quotes

George Albert Smith: The Lord wants us to be happy. That is why he gave us the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why he conferred the priesthood upon us. He wants us to have joy. That is why he organized this church and set in it the various offices, and all these things are in order. ... If you will follow the leadership of the Lord, and those whom the Lord sustains, you will not fall away into darkness, lose the light, transgress the laws of God, and forfeit your privileges that he is so anxious that all of us should enjoy.

George Albert Smith: There is only one pathway of safety for me in this day and that is to follow those whom the Lord has appointed to lead. I may have my own ideas and opinions, I may set up my own judgment with reference to things, but I know that when my judgment conflicts with the teachings of those that the Lord has given to us to point the way, I should change my course. If I desire salvation I will follow the leaders that our Heavenly Father has given to us, as long as he sustains them.

Sources:

- GAS = George Albert Smith, chapter 6 of lesson manual
- OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*
- Snuffer = Denver Snuffer, Jr., *18 Questions*.