

*Strengthening Families with Multiple Problems and Children
at Risk:
Alternatives to Giving Up*

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It is important for me to know who I am talking to. If this were a smaller group, I would want to start by asking each of you to introduce yourself and say something about why you are here. I am going to talk about families that are in trouble—families with multiple problems and children at risk of abuse or neglect. That is a heavy subject, and I would like to know why you are interested and what you hope to learn during the next hour. Because of the size of the audience and the television camera, I am going to resist the temptation to find out why you are here. If I had to guess, I would say you are here because you know of a family in trouble, and you want to help. You may be a bishop who is spending 90 percent of your time on 10 percent of the ward membership, and you feel like you are spinning your wheels—not making progress. You may be a Relief Society president who is grieving with a troubled sister who has seemingly insurmountable problems within her family, and you are not sure how to help. You may be a relative of a troubled family. You feel responsible to lend support, but you are overwhelmed. There are so many problems you don't even know where to start, and you have problems with your own family. Or the troubled family I am going to talk about may be yours. You may be desperately in need of help and don't know where to go or who to ask.

Regardless of who you are or why you are here, I suspect you know at least one troubled family. My hope is that you will leave this session today with hope—with a way of viewing problems and the problem-solving process so that solutions seem feasible and your burden feels lighter.

I am going to frame my remarks in the context of ecclesiastic responsibility. Let's assume that you are all bishops or Relief Society presidents who are worried about a troubled family. So let me apologize at the outset if I assume too much. I know better than to tell a bishop how to do his job. But I know also that bishops are quick to ask for help when their ward members are in trouble. So let's talk about those troubled families.

Let me introduce you to the Jones family. (This is not a real family. It is a composite of real situations of which I am well aware, and you probably are, too.) Cathy, the mother, is 34 years old. The Relief Society president is worried about her because she is depressed. The visiting teachers reported that she never smiles. Her house is a mess, and she reports that she is always tired and spends a lot of time sleeping. She feels like a failure because of her children's problems. She admitted that she has had a number of arguments with her husband since he lost his job, and during one of those arguments, he slapped her, but she was quick to admit that she probably deserved it. She tends to take responsibility for her husband's problems, too. She is worried about family finances and would like to get a job, but she didn't graduate from high school and has virtually no marketable skills.

Tom, the father, is 37 years old. He works construction and was fired recently when he yelled at his boss. He has a violent temper and has been physically abusive with his wife and children. The home teachers are concerned because his church attendance is sporadic, and they have suspected he might have a Word of Wisdom problem.

Tom and Cathy have three children. Jason (age 14) is a rowdy teenager who frequently gets into trouble. He was recently arrested for stealing a laptop computer at school. Sunday School teachers complain that he is disruptive in class, and he appears not to get along very well with his peers. Amanda (age 10) does well in school and has a few good friends; but she is diabetic, and the school nurse is concerned that her diet is not managed very well. Bobby (age 7) has a learning disorder and is hyperactive. Sunday School teachers also complain about him. He came to the attention of child welfare services recently when he was taken by his mother to the hospital because of an "accident" resulting in a broken arm. Tom (the father) later confessed that he was responsible; he got carried away in disciplining Bobby and twisted his arm too hard.

The family is in a financial crisis because of Tom's unemployment. They are delinquent in their rent payments, and eviction has been threatened. Also, their car is badly in need of repair; they can't even get it started.

Does the Jones family sound familiar? Do you feel overwhelmed? How do you respond to this multiplicity of problems? Do you feel like the scripture in Mosiah? ". . . The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just." (Mosiah 4:17.) We need to get help for Amanda; it isn't her fault that she is diabetic. And we should take care of Bobby's broken arm, but Mr. Jones should have known better than to yell at his boss and then take out his frustration on Bobby. And Jason did the stealing on a Wednesday night when he should have been at a Young Men's activity. He deserves whatever punishment the court inflicts on him. As for Mrs. Jones, she gave up too easily. If she would just stop feeling sorry for herself and get busy, the family would not be in such trouble. Shouldn't we just

let child welfare services find a good foster home for the three children and leave Mr. and Mrs. Jones to solve their own problems?

But what about the next verse? “But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done he perisheth forever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.” (Mosiah 4:18.) That is a stern warning. So where do we start in helping the Jones family?

The home teacher thinks the root of all the problems is Mr. Jones’ testimony. If he were really converted, he would have a vision for his family’s progress. He would then seek out the appropriate knowledge and find practical solutions to the problems. I’m sure all of you could give examples of people you know whose lives fell into place in a number of ways after they became active in the church.

Borrowing from a well-know theorist, Abraham Maslow (1954), I am going to shoot holes in the home teacher’s suggestion. In studying what motivates people, Maslow developed what he called a “hierarchy of needs” theory. According to this theory, basic needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be met. The most basic needs are physiological (hunger, thirst, shelter, physical needs). After that comes safety (security, protection from harm). Then love (affection, belongingness, acceptance) and esteem (self-respect, achievement, autonomy). Finally self-actualization (becoming what one is capable of becoming).

Now let’s superimpose the Jones’ situation over this model. The immediate, physiological needs are Bobby’s broken arm, Amanda’s health, and the need for food and housing because of the current financial distress. The Jones’ safety needs are manifested in terms of the father’s unemployment and violent behavior, the son’s illegal behavior, and transportation—a car that won’t run. Their needs for love are evident because of few friends, poor interpersonal skills, and the family not being supportive of each other. The need for esteem is clearly evident with the mother’s depression, low self-esteem, and poor goal achievement. Other members of the family are suffering depression and low self-esteem as well, but they manifest it in different ways (such as violence, illegal behavior, or acting out in the classroom). Finally, we come to self-actualization, and this is where I would place Mr. Jones’ faltering testimony.

So where do we start with the Jones family—with Dad’s faltering testimony or with the imminent need for food, housing, and medical attention? Although, I like the hierarchy of needs model, I also know people who have turned their lives around almost miraculously after a marvelous spiritual conversion. I believe spiritual conversion can motivate us to find ways to fulfill our basic needs, and fulfilling basic needs can help to prepare us for spiritual conversion.

Joseph F. Smith reminded us of this when he said: “You must continue to bear in mind that the temporal and the spiritual are blended. They are not separate. One cannot be carried on without the other, so long as we are here in mortality.”

So back to the question, where do we start in helping the Jones family? Their needs are both broad and deep: Medical attention from doctors and nurses for Bobby’s broken arm; a dietitian to help deal with Amanda’s diabetes; an attorney to represent Jason in court; intervention with

the landlord who wants to evict them; a mechanic to fix their car; education or job training for Mom; social skills and communication training for the whole family, especially Dad to help him manage his anger; and therapy. All of these services require money. Where will the money come from? Faced with this list of problems and needs, you are probably thinking, “Whoa, I’m only a bishop,” “I’m only a Relief Society president,” or “I’m only a grandparent, sister, brother, etc.” “I can’t take on that much responsibility.”

As a professional social worker and social work educator, who studies ways of helping troubled families, let me give you some advice. Don’t let yourself become overwhelmed. As a wise clinician once said to me: “The difference between anxiety and excitement is three deep breaths.” After you have taken those deep breaths, consider these suggestions: (1) Don’t take responsibility away from the family. (2) Follow the guidelines in the handbook. (3) Address primary concerns first. (4) Coordinate a network of resources. Now, let’s take those suggestions one at a time.

First, don’t take responsibility away from the family. Let the family be responsible. Keep in mind that crisis is an opportunity for change. (Don’t panic—remember the three deep breaths.) Families are stronger than they have been given credit for; even troubled families can change. Ask yourself and them how they have managed to survive so far? How have they coped with problems in the past? What values do they want to maximize? What do *they* think they need? How do they think they can get it? Where would *they* like to start? What is *their* assessment of their strengths and resources?

Next, follow the guidelines in the handbook. I obviously don’t have a copy of the current Bishop’s Handbook, and if I did, I hope I would be smart enough not to try to interpret or explain those instructions. But let me give one example of a guideline that sometimes gives us pause. From my experience as a Relief Society president, I am aware that when Church members ask for help, bishops are informed, through instructions in the handbook, that the families of the member in need should be the first source of support. Bishops may be conflicted with regard to that guideline when the member feels strongly that they don’t want to be a burden to their family or don’t want their family to know all the details of their situation. I am going to say more about extended families in a few minutes. For now, this is a reminder that we have the benefit of explicit instructions and guidelines from the General Authorities and our priesthood leaders that should make our jobs easier.

Next, address primary concerns first. Speaking as a social worker, I want to remind you that we have a special responsibility for the safety and well-being of children, and, in the case of the Joneses, the children should be our primary concern. Bishops, you need to be informed regarding state laws about the protection of children. Be respectful of the law and compliant in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. (Remember the twelfth Article of Faith.) Be clear about the parameters of your role and be aware of processes and resources. Let me say a little more about each of those.

First, be informed regarding state laws—how abuse or neglect is defined and how to know whether to report suspected abuse or neglect. If you have any question about who should report, the answer is everyone. I quote here from the “reporting requirements” for Utah (a copy of

which you should have in the syllabus for this session). “. . . when any person . . . has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to incest, molestation, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect, or who observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which would reasonably result in sexual abuse, physical abuse, or neglect, he shall immediately notify the nearest peace officer, law enforcement agency, or office of the division [of Child and Family Services].”

Second, be respectful of the law. The designation “any person” applies to you. You are obligated to report all suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authority. So what are the exceptions to the law? When should you keep information confidential? The law does provide for confidentiality. Again, I quote from the Utah Code: “The notification requirements . . . do not apply to a clergyman or priest, without the consent of the person making the confession, with regard to any confession made to him in his professional character in the course of discipline enjoined by the church to which he belongs, if: (a) the confession was made directly to the clergyman or priest by the perpetrator; and (b) the clergyman or priest is, under canon law or church doctrine or practice, bound to maintain the confidentiality of that confession.” But the statement continues: “When a clergyman or priest receives information about abuse or neglect from any source other than confession of the perpetrator, he is required to give notification on the basis of that information even though he may have also received a report of abuse or neglect from the confession of the perpetrator. Exemption of notification requirements for a clergyman or priest does not exempt a clergyman or priest from any other efforts required by law to prevent further abuse or neglect by the perpetrator.” (Utah Code Section 62A-4a-403)

So what does that law mean for bishops? Let’s say that Mr. Jones confesses to you that he was responsible for Bobby’s broken arm. He feels bad and wants to change. So, Bishop, you counsel with him and meet with him regularly over a period of time. He agrees, as part of a church disciplinary action, to do certain things; and, by virtue of your role as an authorized clergyman, you agree to monitor his behavior to make sure he does what he has promised to do. Within the context of that confession and disciplinary action, you are bound to confidentiality. Now let’s complicate the situation. Let’s assume that shortly after your meeting with Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones comes into your office and tells you that her husband was responsible for Bobby’s broken arm. Because you have now obtained the information from a source other than the confession of Mr. Jones, you are obligated to report the abuse to the authorities despite your intent to maintain confidentiality.

Let’s examine a second possible scenario. Assume that after a few months of working with Mr. Jones and your maintaining confidentiality, he admits to having been abusive with Bobby again. Your confidentiality agreement is only binding as long as Mr. Jones is true to his agreement to not hurt Bobby or anyone else again. So you are now obligated to contact the authorities.

The next point in addressing the safety and well-being of children is to be clear about your role. You may be an informant, but that does not make you the enemy, and there is no need for you to take sides. Also, you are a spiritual counselor, not a therapist, and the burden of this problem shouldn’t be exclusively on your shoulders. You should be part of a larger, supportive network. As part of that network (assuming, for example, that you have made contact with child welfare

services), you should inform yourself. Ask a lot of questions, identify yourself, and define your role in that network; be a team player and do what you can to strengthen the team.

So it follows naturally that my fourth major suggestion in responding to families with multiple problems is to be a part of, or to coordinate, a network of resources. Don't try to solve all the problems by yourself. Don't overestimate your power or importance. Life for this family did not start and will not end with your involvement.

What do I mean by a supportive network? We start with the child and surround that child with the nuclear family, which is surrounded by an extended family. Then we identify other sources of support from the community. As a church leader, you have direct involvement with the members of the nuclear family, as do the neighbors and friends. The child has direct contact with the school and social services. The parents have the most direct contact to extended family members. The extended family members have contacts to additional resources such as other friends or a minority community, and they might have suggestions or connections to possible employment opportunities. All these members of the network would likely have additional contacts or suggestions, expanding the supportive network exponentially.

Networking is a word we use a lot in social work. We are in the business of surrounding the family with resources, both formal and informal. "Formal resources" are services available through the community. These might include clinical services such as marital, family, or individual therapy and training to improve various life-management skills such as parenting, anger management, and conflict resolution. Concrete services might be provided. These are basic necessities such as housing, food, clothing, transportation, or cash assistance. A caseworker might work with a family in accessing various resources in the community such as legal services, employment services, parent aid, or day care.

"Informal services" are the supports that will still be available when government programs disappear. As a social worker, I am eager to identify informal as well as formal resources, because those are the people and organizations that care the most about my client and will perhaps be the most likely to follow through with support if there is appropriate coordination and direction. Many of the families we work with have strong religious ties. In addition to spiritual guidance, a church can provide care and concern—even be a substitute family. Financial assistance is also available. Friends and neighbors can be an important source of support. In addition to friendship, they might help with transportation (since the kids are likely to be participating in the same after-school or church activities). Or they might provide child care. They can be mentors and help in monitoring the activities of a parent or child at risk. Extended family members can also mentor and monitor, and they may be available for temporary or permanent child care. They might also help with financial assistance.

Now that we have identified a number of both formal and informal resources, let's back up and talk about how you organize a network. If you are a bishop, you probably start with the ward welfare committee, which would consist of the Relief Society president, elders quorum president, high priest group leader, Young Men president, Young Women president, and Primary president. You might also include the ward employment specialist. As bishop, you also have

direct access to the stake president, LDS Family Services, the Bishops' Storehouse, and cash assistance through the fast offering fund.

In the case of the Jones family, you might be invited to become a part of a broader network, including the caseworker, a professional counselor, various state welfare agencies, extended family members, neighborhood, friends, a school counselor, a nurse, and a representative of Juvenile Court.

Of all these resources I have mentioned, the extended family is most likely to be permanent—the people who will always care the most and have the greatest love for the troubled family or child at risk. But ironically, the extended family is perhaps the most underdeveloped or neglected resource.

Historically, individual identity was intrinsically linked to the family, extended family, and the larger family, or tribe. Governments recognized the importance of families and expected them to take care of their own. But a number of changes during the 20th century caused the influence of the family to shrink and the influence of the government to expand.

The 20th century was a time of tremendous progress, but the ongoing lesson for us is that strengths are also potential weaknesses, and as a society we haven't done very well in terms of balancing those strengths and weaknesses—selectively benefiting from the positive without also welcoming the negative aspects of growth and change. Some of those changes that were responsible for shrinking the influence of the family were the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, and advances in transportation and communication—all of which gave us more individual freedom and made family members less dependent on each other. Added to this was expanding government agencies and increasing public responsibility, such as mandatory reporting laws (to deal with child abuse and neglect). All of these changes made divorce easier and more socially acceptable. The result of all this progress was focus on the individual, who is tangentially connected to a family which may or may not be linked to an extended family and a larger family organization, or tribe.

Later in the 20th century, policy makers and government workers (such as social workers) began to realize that the government isn't very good at raising children. New initiatives were introduced to undo the damage. For example, Public Law 96-272 in 1980 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 mandated state agencies to focus on families, not just at-risk children. During the last two decades common buzz words within child welfare services have been terms such as permanency planning, family preservation services, and reunification services—to keep children out of foster care whenever possible and to help children who had been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect return to their homes. Later, extended families became a source of foster care (called “kinship care”), and social workers began involving extended family in making decisions and solving problems (called family group decision making).

I am currently focusing my research efforts on a model known as the Family Group Conference. This model was borrowed from the Polynesians of New Zealand, where family networks are powerful.

I would like to explain the Family Group Conference by taking you back to the Jones family. With a little effort and a lot of time on the telephone, the caseworker assigned to the Joneses discovered that Tom has a sister, Jane, who lives close by. She never married, but she loves children—especially her nieces and nephews. Tom’s mother, Anne, also lives close by. She has some health problems, but she enjoys having her grandchildren visit occasionally. Tom’s brother, Robert, and his wife, Patty, live about 30 miles away with their four children. Robert works as a computer programmer. Their children are about the same ages as Jason, Amanda, and Bobby. Cathy’s parents, Peter and Shirley, are retired and live in Arizona. Cathy’s sister, Margaret, and her husband, Hank, live in California with their two children. Hank is a forest ranger.

All of these people were contacted by the caseworker and invited to attend a family meeting. The grandparents, Peter and Shirley, who live in Arizona, traveled at their own expense to attend the meeting. Children’s services paid for the gasoline so that Margaret and Hank could drive from California. Tom and Cathy felt that the cousins were too young to attend the meeting, but baby sitting was arranged for them by a neighbor. Jason was included in the meeting, but Amanda chose to stay at the neighbors, and Bobby also stayed with the cousins.

In addition to the three members of the nuclear family, there were eight extended family members present at the meeting. At the meeting, these eleven family members were joined by the school counselor (remember Jason’s theft took place at school), the caseworker for Jason, the Guardian *ad litem* for Bobby, a neighbor who was also a good friend of Cathy’s, and the Jones’ bishop in addition to the social worker who was the facilitator for the meeting.

The meeting began with everyone introducing themselves in terms of their relationship or connection to the children—Jason, Amanda, and Bobby. The facilitator then invited the group to identify the strengths of the Jones family. They discovered that Mr. Jones has skills; he is employable. Mrs. Jones realizes she needs help (which is an important strength—she is motivated to change). Jason has a talent for electronics, which Mom and Dad had not been aware of (the school counselor volunteered that information). Amanda does very well in school, which wasn’t a surprise. Bobby likes to make up stories and is fascinated by Harry Potter. The parents love their children. The children love their parents. The extended family members are supportive. And the Church is an important resource.

After the list of strengths, they were invited to list problems and concerns. That list included Mr. Jones’ unemployment, financial problems, Mrs. Jones’ depression, child abuse (Bobby’s broken arm and Mr. Jones’ temper), Jason’s trouble with the law, and their difficulty getting along with each other. The facilitator pointed out that the list of strengths and resources was much longer than the list of concerns, and the facilitator added to the list of strengths and resources by inviting the professionals present to share information with the family about a variety of resources available in the community.

Then the facilitator explained the process of developing a plan to address the concerns. The caseworker told the family that Jason would be expected to appear before a juvenile court judge on a certain date, and when they go to court, they should go with a plan for how to support Jason and monitor his behavior in order to prevent illegal activity in the future. The Guardian *ad litem*

for Bobby explained to the family that she represented the state in taking responsibility for Bobby's safety. Because of Bobby's broken arm, there was concern about the need for protection, and her supervisor had discussed with her the possibility of removing Bobby from the home and placing him in foster care. Her preference was to leave Bobby at home with his family, but she needed to have a plan in place that would satisfy the judge regarding how to protect Bobby and the other children from further harm. The facilitator asked the family if they had any questions about the process, and then all the professionals left the room so that the family could discuss the concerns privately.

I'm not going to talk about the private family time. I don't really know what happened, but the family did come up with a plan. When the professionals were invited back into the room, they went over the plan, and a couple of suggestions were made regarding additional resources that might be useful. The final plan looked like this: (1) The caseworker will arrange for an anger management class for Mr. Jones, contact the local housing authority to intervene with the landlord, and help Mr. Jones contact Job Services. (2) The bishop will take care of current medical expenses using fast offering funds, provide food for the next three months through the Bishops' Storehouse, and arrange for marital and family counseling through LDS Family Services. (3) Uncle Robert and Aunt Patty will loan the family a car to use until they can get their car fixed. Also Robert will spend one evening a week with Jason teaching him computer skills, and he will go with Jason and his parents to the court hearing. (4) The neighbor will help Mrs. Jones organize her household chores with a job chart for the children. She will also drive Mrs. Jones to her classes each week. (Mrs. Jones will enroll in a program for displaced homemakers.) The neighbor will also visit once a week and talk with her about the program, her progress, and her plans. (5) The school counselor will arrange for Jason to do yard work for the teacher from whom he stole the laptop computer—reparation. (6) Grandmother will pick up Bobby from school two afternoons a week, and they will read Harry Potter books together. (7) Amanda will walk to Aunt Jane's house after school once a week, and they will spend time cooking and baking (experimenting with foods for diabetics). (8) Uncle Hank and Aunt Margaret will organize a "Cousins' Camp" in California—a time during the summer when all the cousins can spend a week together in the mountains. (Remember, Hank is a forest ranger.) Margaret will give some thought to focusing on teaching interpersonal skills during that week. (9) The caseworker will follow up by visiting the family weekly and try to reinforce what the parents are learning in therapy and their classes, especially parenting skills and alternative forms of discipline. The bishop will check on the family monthly along with the home teachers and the visiting teachers. A six-month follow-up meeting was scheduled.

Through this plan, the responsibilities were distributed so that no one person felt overwhelmed, and there was a built-in mechanism for monitoring the plan and changing it if needed. For example, Robert and Patty were reluctant to part with their second car for longer than one month. After one month, Jane would pick up the car and return it to Robert and Patty. If the Jones' car were not repaired by then, they would go to plan B—relying on public transportation until the follow-up meeting or call another meeting to come up with plan C.

You probably noticed that not all the problems were solved with the plan, and not all the resources were explored. For example, the plan didn't address Bobby's learning disorder except that Grandma will read with him twice a week. And the plan didn't include an assignment for

the grandparents who live in Arizona. The intent of the family meeting is to address the most immediate concerns and to provide a mechanism for ongoing support. It has been my experience as a professional that no matter how many problems you solve, there will always be more; and no matter how many resources you exhaust, you can always find more. Also, keep in mind that we don't want to take all the responsibility away from the Jones family. They have been surviving without our help for a long time, and they will continue to survive after we withdraw our help. But we hope that our involvement will provide a jump start and empower them to be more self-sufficient, so that they will be thriving—not just surviving.

I recently completed an evaluation of the Family Group Conference model as implemented within the Utah Division of Child and Family Services. After studying many cases of child abuse and neglect and completing many interviews, we found that there was initial reluctance, on the part of both family members and professionals, to include extended family members in the decision making and problem solving process. We heard comments like, “I don't trust my family”; “I don't want my family members to know about my problems”; or “I don't want to be a burden on my family.” Many of the professional caseworkers were also reluctant. We heard the question, “How far the apple from the tree?” In other words, “If the nuclear family is dysfunctional, why should we expect the extended family to be any different?” What we are learning, however, is that almost every family, no matter how troubled, has relatives that can be an important source of support. There is always an “apple” that rolled a little further away from the tree.

In our study, we also found that after the family meeting was over, people were glad to have been involved in the process and wished that more of the extended family had been invited to participate. Through these meetings, helpful resources were identified; good plans were developed to keep children safe; professionals felt rewarded; families felt empowered; and family relationships were strengthened. I would like to share a few of the specific findings from the study.

Half of the family members who were interviewed felt that the family meeting helped them overcome unhealthy ways in which the family relates or makes decisions. Three-fourths felt that the family would not have been able to resolve the issue without the intervention. Half thought their family communicated better in general because of the intervention, and half thought their family would be likely to hold meetings now on their own. Almost 90 percent felt that the conference was an appropriate intervention for their family, and 84 percent said they would recommend it to another family. When asked if the plan that was developed helped to maintain the safety and stability of the children, three-fourths responded “very well.” Sixty percent said they felt empowered by the experience. We interviewed eight of the children (the children who were old enough) a year after the intervention. In answer to the question “do you think the plan helped you?” 88 percent said “yes.” We asked them if they thought the plan helped their mom or dad [the adult who abused/neglected them], and 50 percent answered “yes.”

Some of you might be wondering why I was so encouraged by these findings. We didn't get 100 percent positive responses, but we kept reminding ourselves about the kind of families with whom we were working—families like the Joneses. All the problems were not solved, but the families were able to make significant progress and to take responsibility.

We concluded from our study that families are generally capable of solving their own problems if given adequate support. Family members are more likely to follow through with their part of the plan when they take part in developing the plan. And it takes more than just a father and a mother to raise a child successfully.

In conclusion, I need to explain that I am not trying to turn you all into professional social workers. I *do* understand the difference between the responsibilities of ecclesiastical leaders, extended family members, and professional social workers. But troubled families need a lot of help from a variety of sources. Strengthening troubled families is a work we must engage in together. My hope, in sharing a bit of my professional perspective with you, is that you will leave this session today feeling less burdened—recognizing that you can be part of a supportive network that includes professionals and that there are always additional supportive resources to explore.

Thank you for being here today. Your presence is an indication of your desire to support and help families. I honor you for that desire and support. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have special resources not available to professionals. We have scripture and the words of our modern prophets, and we have personal and family prayer. Those resources are by far the most important resources, and I encourage you to pray about what you are learning here at this conference. Perhaps you will never participate in a Family Group Conference or involve extended families in the manner I have described. But if you are open to being taught by the Spirit, it is my hope that you will go home with an idea, a different approach, a new resource that will make a significant difference to at least one family.