

Letter received by Elder Robert K. Dellenbach on the Duty to God Program

Dear Elder Dellenbach,

My son was a 17-year-old priest in the Aaronic Priesthood when the new version of the Duty to God program was introduced. Because my husband was serving in the YM organization of our ward, I was introduced through both of them to this new program. As I read through the priest booklet my son brought home, then through the parent's guide and the other booklets, deacon and teacher, my husband brought home, I instantly knew that this program was going to bless the lives of the YM and the families of the Church and the world.

My son was a little skeptical as I told him I thought it would be important for him to accomplish the 2 years of priests requirements in the last year he had available in the priests quorum. The YM leaders and bishop were telling the boys they didn't have to do it if they didn't want to, but that was not the stand we took in our home.

As it became apparent to us that our YM leaders were not going to push this with our older YM, I had the idea one day to do the program within our family using FHE as a vehicle for it. My son is the youngest of our 4 children, and the only boy. At the time this was coming about, he was the only one left at home. FHE was kind of a struggle for us with him by himself because he felt like he was always being singled out. So, then the idea came to me to put together a FHE group. There were a few families in the ward at the time who all had boys the same age as mine, and they were also the only ones left at home. I contacted all of them and they were also anxious to have their sons complete the 2 years of priest requirements, and struggling to get them to do it. So, we formed a FHE group, we had 4 17-yr-old priests, and the younger deacon-age brother of one of them. We met the 1st Monday of each month, having planned ahead for what requirement the boys would be passing off each time we met. The boys worked through the 2 years of requirements, doing such things in our FHE group as learning and leading music, memorizing the sacrament prayers and learning what they were about and meant, they went through the entire 2 years of requirements.

What a blessing this was to all of our families as we did this with our sons, we grew closer to each other as families, we grew closer to our sons, and we all grew closer to our Heavenly Father and Savior. Our families were

strengthened, and our sons no longer scoffed quite as much as they did when we were trying to do this as individual families. Now they knew that they were all in this together and it made it just a little more fun or less "cheesy" for them!

One of the families that joined us in this endeavor is Pres. Stan Nielson, he is the 1st counselor in our stake presidency. His input and help with this effort was invaluable. I think his presence, in the minds of our boys, lent some credibility that they didn't believe just their parents had!! However during the time we were doing this, he and his family moved from our ward to a neighboring ward in our stake, but they continued meeting with us.

By the time June came along, 3 of these YM, including my son, were graduating from high school and before they left for college, received their Duty to God medallions. I don't believe that any of us, including my son, knew the long range impact this experience would have on him or us.

My son went to two semesters at BYU-Idaho, and during the second semester there he turned in his missionary papers. He received his mission call in November, and went through the Las Vegas Temple over Thanksgiving weekend. He was so much more prepared for the temple than were any of his sisters, I believe that is due in part to the great leadership, especially the stake president he had at BYU-Idaho, but I also believe it was due in part to the experience of accomplishing the requirements in the Duty to God priest book. He had a knowledge and a testimony of the temple that my girls did not gain until much later.

He received a call to the Uruguay Montevideo Mission and went into the MTC on Jan. 14, 2004. His first day in the MTC he attended his first district meeting. As he was sitting there waiting for it to begin, the district president walked in, walked directly up to my son, handed him a hymn book, looked at his name tag and said, "Elder Torrance, please pick a hymn and lead us in an opening song." My son related to us that everyone sitting around him turned as white as a sheet, but he, due to the training he received through the Duty to God requirements, took the hymn book, stood up and said, "I'd be glad to". As he returned to his seat all the elders around him said to him, "Oh gosh, I'm so glad he didn't pick me, I don't know how to do that!"

The first letter we received home from the MTC had written in it this line, "Thank goodness for Duty to God!" In Uruguay he has had experiences where he has used the skills he learned through Duty to God. One such

experience involved the Primary in the little branch he was serving in.

They had no one who could lead music in the branch, and as soon as the branch president discovered he could, he was pressed into service leading the music in sacrament meeting and teaching someone else to replace him. The Primary President of the branch came to him and told him that they needed to teach the Primary a hymn that was to be sung in the Children's Sacrament Meeting Presentation, and that no one in the branch knew the hymn, how to sing it, or how to teach it, and asked for his help. He was able to go into Primary for a few Sundays and not only teach the hymn to the children, but to the leaders as well, in addition to teaching them some basic music leading skills. The branch president's wife asked my son how he had developed these skills, and he told her about the Duty to God program and our FHE group and all of a sudden he began to realize what kind of an impact that had on his life.

I recently have been hearing from my son about the branch he is now in. It is in a very small rural area, Triente y Tres, which he refers to as "33". He has been telling us that the "area" is really pushing the wards and branches to utilize the Duty to God/Personal Progress programs, but that the branch he is in is not doing it. So, with the approval of the ward leadership, he and his companion have put together a YM/YW group which meets once a week. The two missionaries plan ahead and prepare to teach the requirements so the youth can learn the skills and pass them off. The branch leadership is very excited about the impact this is having, and through the missionaries efforts, the leaders, the youth and the parents are beginning to understand the importance of these programs. The other missionaries asked him, how did you ever think of this idea? He just laughed and said, Oh, it just came to me. Then he wrote home and said, "who ever knew what an impact your little FHE group would have, it is being felt around the world."

At the time that the new Preach My Gospel program arrived in Uruguay Montevideo Mission, my son was serving in the mission office as executive secretary to the president. One day I received an email from my son, telling me with great excitement that the Preach My Gospel program had arrived. He described to us that as they were unpacking the boxes and held the books in their hands, he could feel the Spirit so strongly he was awed. Then he told us that as he and his companion sat down to study the program for the first time, he had a realization come to him. His comment was, "Mom, I just got it. The Faith in God Program, the Duty to God Program, the raising of the bar for missionaries, this all works hand in hand. The Primary is preparing the

kids for the Duty to God Program. The Duty to God Program is preparing YM for missions, and those missionaries who are now in the field are the ones who have been held to higher standards. We are ready to take this to the world!!!! I hope you can imagine the tears in my eyes as I read his testimony, and his apology for ever having scoffed at my insistence that he do those two years of priest requirements, even though his leaders told him he didn't have to.

My only personal experience with this program has been the priest-age booklet. But, that younger deacon-age boy that met with our group is now a teacher, nearly a priest himself. I have watched him as he, with the help of his mom and his leaders, has worked through the deacon book, and the teacher book. I see a young man who is even better prepared for his responsibilities than was my son at that age. I am excited to watch this other YM as he nears the age of a priest and then goes on to be awarded his medallion, and to see how even better prepared he will be to serve the Lord.

I only wish that I could get the leaders of my own ward, who still don't do much with this, to understand the impact it can have on lives. I actually spoke on this in our wards sacrament meeting a couple weeks ago, incorporating not only Duty to God, but Faith in God and Personal Progress. It sadly seems that these programs are not being used to their potential, unless it is done by families, and that is really not happening either. But, as a mother, I am so grateful for the Duty to God program, for the impact it has had on my son, and on our family. It is truly inspired.

Cathy Torrance
Lakes Stake Primary President
Las Vegas, Nevada

Elder Steven Torrance
Uruguay Montevideo Mission