

**THE**  
Experiences of Bishops  
**BISHOP**  
in The Church of Jesus Christ  
of Latter-day Saints  
**BOOK**  
in Their Own Words

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The Bishop Book: Experiences of Bishops in The Church of Jesus Christ of  
Latter-day Saints in Their Own Words

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# INTRODUCTION

I can still vividly recall the Sunday I was released. It was a very emotional day. As was normal on Sundays I was driving home alone, and I felt just this tremendous sense of loss. It felt like part of my heart had been ripped out. When I got about half a mile from my house the pain was so strong I had to pull over, and for about a half hour, maybe forty-five minutes, I just cried because—it's getting to me even now—that mantle was gone. It was a very lonely feeling.

What just happened?

To answer that question, we need to understand what it's like to be a bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What is the release? What is the mantle? And why would a newly released bishop feel so much loss and so much pain?

This book will explore these questions and many others in an attempt to make sense of the experience of a bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But before we examine the experiences, insights, and recollections of those who have served in the calling we first need to answer the question, what exactly *is* such a bishop?

To begin, a bishop\* is a dedicated, faithful, married Priesthood holder ordained by Church authority to lead a ward or congregation.

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\* Throughout the book, we refer to a unit leader as a bishop. This title also refers to branch presidents, whose duties are functionally the same.

He must possess and be worthy of a current temple recommend. His three primary roles, which we will explain later, include presiding High Priest, judge in Israel, and president of the Aaronic Priesthood, and his general functions include overseeing both welfare services and record keeping. While carrying out these duties he must constantly juggle and accommodate four often-conflicting demands on his time: his responsibilities to his family, his employer, his church, and himself. To successfully satisfy these duties and responsibilities, over the course of his typically five-year calling a bishop must grow and refine his understanding in every aspect of his life. When the term of a bishop's service ends, he is invariably irrevocably changed.

With this book we hope to illuminate the intensity of the bishop's calling, both its joys and its demands, such that anyone who may embark upon this journey may be served by the observations of those who have already walked the path. In doing so, we hope to help those who've already served to process their own experience. We also believe that all those in any leadership capacity will benefit from the lessons gleaned from bishops. Additionally, we hope that the experiences of those significant others in a bishop's life—wife, children, friends, ward members, work colleagues, etc.—will be rendered sweeter through connections made possible by this book. Finally, we also seek to inform the intellectually curious—those who may simply wonder what it's like to “sit in the bishop's chair.”

To do so, over the past 30 years we sought out and interviewed dozens of then-current and former bishops, recorded their responses to questions such as “What is an effective bishop?” “How do you balance your responsibilities to church, family, and work?” and “What are some of the blessings you experienced in having the calling as a bishop?” We also interviewed several bishop's wives and Stake Presidents (bishops' supervisors) to provide context where appropriate, and to bring forward their experiences and insights. Our approach in this book is to use bishops' own words to develop the primary themes we encountered: the divinity of the call, leadership, service, family, and individual perspectives.

Contributors were selected from within the USA to provide insights from service to congregations in geographic regions with both high and low concentrations of church members. Because of the sensitive nature of many of the quotes in this book, we will not identify these individuals by name. It is also important to note that we have changed many of the specific elements of stories in the book to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of our research participants and those whose stories were shared. Additional description of the story behind this book may be found in the Appendix.

Certain aspects of being a bishop extend beyond his specific job description. Because the bishop provides both spiritual and temporal guidance to his congregation, his assignment includes responsibilities of ministering as well as administering. As a minister he comforts those who are grieving, conducts marriages and funerals, ensures spiritually uplifting worship services, makes hospital and in-home visits to those in need, and offers counsel and guidance to everyone from youth to adults regarding careers, relationships, and matters of sin and repentance (bishops are not trained counselors and are instructed to refer serious or legal cases to professionals). In terms of administration, the bishop oversees numerous and diverse practical matters. These include staffing the ward organization (with positions of teachers, youth and adult leaders, musicians, librarians, etc.), overseeing record-keeping, and conducting regularly scheduled interviews with youth and periodic interviews with those seeking a temple recommend. The bishop also bears responsibility for the finances of the congregation, supervising the collection of tithes and offerings and managing distribution of support to the poor and needy.

Many of these responsibilities have parallels with those of other religious leaders such as Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, and Jewish rabbis, for example, yet the bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ experience is unique. Unlike other religious leaders, bishops serve on a completely voluntary, unpaid basis. Consequently, they attend to their ecclesiastical responsibilities while simultaneously pursuing a full-time career and providing for their families. Additionally, they

receive no formal training before or after they are called. Moreover, while bishops serve as volunteers, they do not campaign or apply for their position, nor do they even volunteer. Instead, they are assigned through revelation, and then are invited to accept the assignment. The assignment is strictly temporary. After about five years the bishop is released from this calling and returns to being an ordinary member of the congregation, replaced by another—a newly-called bishop. Members of congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world regularly accept these transitions of leadership without protest or distress.

Who are these people called to be bishops? They range from newly married young adults to senior citizens, from executives of Fortune 100 companies to elementary school teachers, from Harvard-educated PhD's to those with very little formal education, from energetic extroverts to soft-spoken introverts. Examples of high-profile individuals who have served as bishops in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints include Mitt Romney, U.S. Senator and former Governor of Massachusetts; Bill Marriott, Executive Chairman of Marriott International; Chris Hoke, two-time Super Bowl-winning nose tackle of the Pittsburgh Steelers; James Quigley, former CEO of Deloitte; Bart Oates, three-time Super Bowl champion and President of the NFL Alumni Association, and Danny Ainge, former President of the Boston Celtics and current CEO of the Utah Jazz. But the vast majority are called, serve, and are then released in relative anonymity.

In this book we listen carefully to those who are or who have been bishops—and to their wives. We explore five overarching roles that seem to encapsulate the essence of what it means to be a bishop: the bishop as one divinely called, the bishop as a leader, the bishop as a servant, the bishop as a family man, and the bishop as an individual. Within that framework we identify common themes, weaving together actual words spoken by those interviewed.\* We also include

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\* Quotes have been edited for clarity and readability.



some of the written words of General Authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have spoken about bishops.

We therefore invite you, the reader, to walk with us into the world of the bishop in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While the scenery you see will be sketched in verbal terms, we encourage you to imagine the role of bishop holistically, and in a multifaceted and compassionate way. As you do, we hope that your understanding of a bishop and his calling will be enriched, inspired, and transformed.

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## APPENDIX

# THE STORY OF “THE BISHOP BOOK”

(BY BRAD AGLE)

In August of 1990 I was in the middle of my PhD program at the University of Washington and attended the annual conference of the Academy of Management in San Francisco. There I met Professor Jeff Sonnenfeld and received and subsequently accepted his offer to be the research director of his new leadership center at Emory University. While my earlier PhD studies had touched on leadership topics, during the next two years I was fully engulfed in the study of leadership.

Just prior to moving from Seattle to Atlanta, our family had experienced a change in the bishop of our ward. That change got me thinking about the role of bishops and what our ward needed from a new bishop. Upon our arrival in Atlanta we were met by a particularly solicitous and kind bishop, furthering my interest in the role. So, in my deep dive into the theory and research on leadership, I often contemplated the leadership of bishops, the place where the rubber meets the road in the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While busy working on my PhD dissertation on the leadership of CEOs of large companies, I started to map out in my mind a fairly

standard study examining the relationship between the leadership characteristics and behaviors of bishops and their effectiveness.

In August of 1991 I was back at the annual conference of the Academy of Management, this time in Miami. Because the conference always goes over a Sunday, I'm always looking for a local ward to attend. One of my fellow faith-adherent PhD students asked me on Saturday evening if I'd like a ride to church the next day—absolutely! Thus, the next morning I found myself in the back seat of my friend's rental car headed out for church in Miami. Seated next to me was Ron Mitchell, a doctoral student from the University of Utah who I had never met before. Over the next hour, as our mutual friend sought fruitlessly to find the church building in the pre-GPS era, Ron and I got to know one another. When I talked about my interest in the leadership of bishops, he noted that he had already served as a bishop. Ron started his PhD journey after having already had a successful business career.

During the course of our conversation, Ron said the following to me: "Bishops deal with a lot of difficult experiences. For a lot of bishops, what do you think is the most difficult part of that experience?" By that point in life, I had been in the wards of probably a dozen and a half bishops (half of those as a missionary in Germany and Austria), as well as observing my father serve as the branch president in Bay City, Michigan. I suggested things like welfare issues, marital and family troubles, crises of faith, and untimely deaths and other tragedies. While acknowledging the difficulties of these issues, he suggested that for many bishops the most difficult part of the experience is being released. That came as a surprise to me, and a new research team was formed. Ron shared my enthusiasm for this project and we began what has become a lifelong friendship and research partnership. Much of our most impactful academic research and writing has been done together. We didn't find church that day, but Gordon, we thank you for the ride!

By 1994, Ron and I had both completed our PhD programs and had begun our respective faculty positions at the University of

Victoria and the University of Pittsburgh. We developed a research approach to our questions utilizing interviews with bishops, former bishops, their wives, and stake presidents. After discussing our project with the research department of the church, we conducted our first set of interviews. We interviewed dozens of individuals along the Wasatch Front and in "mission" areas of the church. Our interviewees served in the full gamut of types of wards and branches in the United States.

One of our major observations from the first round of interviews was that nailing down the notion of "bishop effectiveness" was going to be very challenging. Each bishop, bishop's wife, and stake president had their own definition of "effectiveness" or "success." This was further solidified in our minds as we read Elder Robert D. Hales' 1986 *Ensign* article on the call of a bishop. In that talk he discussed having served as a bishop three times and each time having been a different bishop, meeting very different needs. Thus, over some time, our project morphed from being a social science project on the determinants of bishop effectiveness to an oral history project seeking to understand the experiences of bishops.

If by now you're figuring out that this project took a long time to complete (over 30 years), it is because our other priorities kept taking precedence. The best illustration of this phenomenon occurred shortly after our first set of interviews. Ron and I were scheduled to attend a small conference together in Toronto in 1994, after which he was coming to Pittsburgh for a few days so that we could work on the project. Meanwhile, at the conference in Toronto, the main ideas for what would ultimately become our most cited academic article were formed. So, instead of working on the bishop project, we sat on the porch of my University of Pittsburgh colleague and outlined our other project. For the next twenty-something years we would spend time in the small windows of our busy lives working on this bishop project.

In December of 2001, I was called to be the first bishop of the newly created Cranberry ward in the Pittsburgh Pennsylvania North Stake. I was given about five weeks to learn about the members of the

three wards who would be joining the new ward, call a ward council, and be prepared to begin serving when the new ward was established in mid-January. In addition to those activities, I pulled out the notes and interview transcripts from the bishop project and read them all. They turned out to be very insightful and helpful to me in my service. Thus, my service as bishop provided further motivation to continue the project.

In 2009 I joined the faculty at BYU. Ron and I continued to work on the bishop project by doing other interviews and discussing the project periodically. I even got to spend one glorious week working together with Ron and his wife Cynthia in Lubbock Texas after he had accepted a position at Texas Tech University.

In my role as the George W. Romney Endowed Professor at BYU, I have had the privilege of getting acquainted with many members of the Romney family. One of George and Lenore's great-grandsons, Camden Robinson, worked for me as an undergraduate research assistant at BYU in the Wheatley Institution. His light and brilliance shined, even among the many incredible students I've had in my career. His contribution to my book *The Business Ethics Field Guide* was significant. As he was entering his senior year, I was pondering the best way to utilize his talents for my last time. I knew that if I put Camden on the bishop project, it would get finished. Ron agreed and Camden joined the research team. Sure enough, within months of Camden graduating we had largely completed the book. This was no small task. Completion included another round of interviews to fill in gaps, identification of themes with specific quotes from interviewees, incorporation of insights from General Authority talks, writing, and editing.

At the conclusion of this project, Ron and I would like to thank our wives, Cynthia and Kristi, and families, for their encouragement, patience, and assistance during the thirty years of this project. Kristi conducted the interviews with wives of bishops and also typed out interview transcripts. My daughter Lindsay also typed out interview transcripts. Recently Ron told me of the detailed list of research projects he's kept since beginning his research career, numbering now in the 200s. This project is the first one on that list.

Camden would like to thank his darling wife and eternal companion, Alexandra, for her undying love, support, and understanding; his parents for their love and friendship; Jack and Mary Lois Wheatley for their sponsorship and support; and me, Brad Agle, for taking a chance on a young freshman and igniting his love for research (editorial note: one of the most rewarding "chances" I've ever taken).

All three of us express our appreciation for Camden's mother, Robin Robinson, a professional editor, for providing such wonderful editing of our work. She not only brought a professional editor's experience to the work, but also the perspective of a gospel scholar and wife of a former bishop and current stake president. This manuscript benefited greatly from all of her talents. We also would like to thank the Wheatley Institute at BYU for providing support for our project. The past director, Richard Williams, and the assistant director, Emily Madsen Reynolds, were wonderful cheerleaders. We are also grateful for members of the church research department for their help and encouragement at various times during this project. We also thank those who have commented on previous versions of our manuscript, recognizing that all errors, omissions, etc., remain ours.

Most importantly, we want to thank the dozens of bishops, bishop's wives, and stake presidents who sat down with us and shared their experiences and thoughts. Because of the sensitive nature of many of the quotes in this book, we will not identify these individuals by name. It is also important to note that we have changed many of the specific elements of stories in the book to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of our research participants and those whose stories were shared.

To finish, I would like to thank one bishop in particular, Bishop Earnie Kean of the Butler Pennsylvania ward. Prior to his untimely passing, Bishop Kean would frequently encourage me to never give up on this project. He considered the insights we had gained to be extremely important, and wanted to ensure that bishops and other leaders in the church received this wisdom. We join with Bishop Kean in his hope that this project will be a blessing to current, former, and future bishops, and to all those who love and serve with them.



# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## Bradley R. Agle

Bradley R. Agle is the George W. Romney Endowed Professor and Professor of Ethics and Leadership in the Marriott School of Business at Brigham Young University (BYU), founder and Chairman of Merit Leadership, and lead author of the popular book *The Business Ethics Field Guide*. He also currently serves in the following capacities: Editorial Board of *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Global Board of the BYU Management Society, Board of Directors of New England Science and Sailing, BYU Faculty Advisory and Honor Code Advisory Councils, President of the Fellows of the International Association for Business and Society, and Fellow of the Ethics and Compliance Initiative.

From 1992 to 2009 Dr. Agle was a professor in the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh, where he also served as the inaugural director of the David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership. He has served as President of the International Association for Business and Society, on the Board of Directors of the Oncology Nursing Society, on the Ethics Committee of USA Synchro, as a Senior Research Fellow with the Ethics Resource Center in Washington, D.C., as Co-chair of the Pittsburgh Business Ethics Awards, as a judge for the American Business Ethics Awards, as the

Andersen Fellow for Chief Executive Studies at Emory University, and as a Fellow and Chair of the Ethics Initiative in the BYU Wheatley Institution. In 2023, he was a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University's Safra Center for Ethics and Duke University's Kenan Institute for Ethics, and a Visiting Professor at the University of Bath and Thailand's National Institute of Development Administration Business School.

Dr. Agle is an active researcher concentrating on business ethics, stakeholder management, CEO leadership, and religious influences on business. He is one of the most cited professors in business ethics, and his writings appear in the top management and ethics journals. His work has been featured in various media outlets including the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *CNN*; and he has been a guest on *CNBC's Morning Call*, *Power Lunch*, and *Closing Bell*. His publication awards include the Best Article award from IABS and the Anbar Citation. In 2005 he received the *Pittsburgh Business Times* Fast Tracker award as one of the young people making significant contributions to his/her profession and community.

A recipient of multiple teaching awards, including Distinguished Professor of the Year, Brad teaches courses in business ethics and strategic leadership, and he has taught in multiple countries throughout the world. He has provided board training, executive level seminars, and top executive consulting to many organizations including Alcoa, BNY Mellon, Ceska Sporitelna, Marathon Petroleum, USAA, U.S. Marine Corps, and the U.S. Special Operations Forces.

In the church he has served in various callings including bishop, bishopric counselor, scoutmaster, high councilor, elders quorum president, and missionary in the Germany, Munich mission.

Dr. Agle received his PhD from the University of Washington and a BS from BYU. He is married to the former Kristi Lynn Kirk, and they have four marvelous children, four fabulous children-in-law, and nine incredibly loved grandchildren.

## **Ronald K. Mitchell**

Ronald K. Mitchell holds the Jean Austin Bagley Regents Chair in Management in the Jerry S. Rawls School of Business at Texas Tech University. In addition, he is the Distinguished Francis G. Winspear Visiting Scholar in Business and Public Policy at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Previously Dr. Mitchell was a jointly-appointed Professor of Public Policy and Strategy at the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University from 1999–2002. From 2014 to June 2020 he served as a Fellow of the Wheatley Institution at Brigham Young University working on the Ethics Initiative.

Transferring from BYU to return to Alberta, Canada for family reasons, Dr. Mitchell obtained his undergraduate degree in 1976 from the University of Calgary and began his career. During his years in the business sector, Dr. Mitchell was instrumental in creating sustainable systems and institutions within business, church, and civic organizations. After 18 years in practice as a CPA, internal auditor and economics coordinator for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, turnaround CEO, consultant, and entrepreneur, Dr. Mitchell returned to school and received his PhD from the University of Utah in 1994. From 1994 to 2005, he served as a professor at the University of Victoria, where he held the Francis G. Winspear Chair in Business and Public Policy from 2000 to 2005.

His dissertation won the 1995 Heizer Award for path-breaking research in entrepreneurship; and it led Dr. Mitchell to become one of the founders of the field of entrepreneurial cognition research. Dr. Mitchell is well cited in management, entrepreneurship, and business ethics journals, publishing over 100 peer reviewed articles and five books; and receiving numerous awards for excellence in teaching and research.

His current academic mission centers on the problems and possibilities in opportunity emergence, and it focuses on better understanding the core systems and institutions that enable greater human capacity and liberty by identifying and removing inherent obstacles.

Some present interests include research at the intersection of stakeholder theory, entrepreneurship, and social welfare, development of the “public utilities” of innovation, and exploration of the cognitions of exchange. Dr. Mitchell publishes and serves in editorial review capacities in the top business journals and was the 2008–2009 Chair of the Entrepreneurship Division of the Academy of Management. He has researched, consulted, and lectured worldwide. Selected publications are available on his website.

Ron performed missionary service for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1970–1972) in both the Southern States Mission and the Nauvoo Mission. After 18 months in the Southern States Mission, he was selected to join fellow missionaries from other missions on the US Eastern Seaboard to reopen Nauvoo for proselyting. He has served in various church callings some of which include: bishop, bishopric councilor, high councilor, high priests group leader, member of the stake mission presidency, and scoutmaster; and he currently serves as gospel doctrine teacher.

He is married to the former Cynthia K. Terry. Ron and Cynthia have four wonderful sons, four marvelous daughters-in-law, and thirteen exciting grandchildren.

## **J. Camden Robinson**

Camden Robinson received his MBA from Harvard Business School. Prior to Harvard, Camden worked at McKinsey & Company and at Springboard, an alternative online education provider.

Camden is passionate about the intersection of ethical behavior and leadership. As an undergraduate at Brigham Young University, he participated in several research projects spanning business ethics, ethical leadership, and corporate social responsibility. He authored a chapter on ethical decision-making that was published in *Research Companion to Behavioral Ethics in Organizations* (2014). In 2016, he participated in writing and publishing *The Business Ethics Field Guide*, a practical guide to help professionals develop their ethical leadership.

Camden has yet to serve as a bishop, but he's learned much about the calling by witnessing first-hand his father's church service, first as a bishop and more recently as a stake president. Camden's own church responsibilities have included callings as High Counselor, Bishopric First Counselor, Elder's Quorum counselor, Ward Mission Leader, and Sunday School Teacher, as well as full-time missionary service in the Guatemala City Central mission.

Camden earned a BS in Economics and a BA in Spanish Studies from Brigham Young University where he graduated summa cum laude and received the Outstanding Spanish Second Major award. He was also selected as a recipient of the Jack & Mary Lois Wheatley Leadership Scholarship. Camden is the youngest son of Greg and Robin Robinson. He is married to the former Alexandra Hild. The two of them currently reside in Boston, Massachusetts.