Worthy male members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have the honor and privilege of holding the priesthood. However, exercising the priesthood carries a responsibility to follow proper authorization.

The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God, through which He created the heavens and the earth and by which He governs the same. It is used to redeem and eventually exalt His children.

As given in mortality, the priesthood is the power and authority to act in God’s name. By and through it, one is authorized to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances and govern in the Church.

One who is worthy and holds the appropriate office to perform specific ordinances is not free to simply act on his own. There is an order to follow and often an authorization to receive.

The Fifth Article of Faith outlines both the receiving of the priesthood and its use:

“We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”

To preach and administer, one follows “those who are in authority.”

“The priesthood is always regulated by those who have the keys, and an ordinance must be recognized by the presiding authority who holds the proper keys and priesthood if the ordinance is to be recorded on the records of the Church,” taught President Boyd K. Packer, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (“What Every Elder Should Know — and Every Sister as Well: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government,” Ensign, February 1993).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained further in the October 2005 general conference:

“One important difference between (priesthood) function in the Church and in the family is the fact that all priesthood authority in the Church functions under the direction of the one who holds the appropriate priesthood keys. In contrast, the authority that presides in the family — whether father or single-parent mother — functions in family matters without the need to get authorization from anyone holding priesthood keys.”

Family authority is applied in directing family activities, meetings and prayer; teaching; counseling; disciplining; and ordained fathers giving priesthood blessings.

“However, priesthood keys are necessary to authorize the ordaining or setting apart of family members,” Elder Oaks continued. “This is because the organization the Lord has made responsible for the performance and recording of priesthood ordinances is the Church, not the family” (“Priesthood Authority in the Family and the Church,” Ensign, November 2005).

In addition to a father’s blessing, no prior authorization is required to perform ordinances or blessings such as consecrating oil and administering to the sick.

However, performing ordinances of salvation (such as baptism and confirmation), other ordinances that are recorded by the Church in meetings where a priesthood leader presides (ranging from the administration of the sacrament to the dedication of a grave) such require authorization from one holding the appropriate priesthood keys.

That priesthood leader authorizes who performs the ordinance, when and where it is done. The leader also confirms the ordinance was performed appropriately.

A worthy priesthood holder cannot decide on his own to conduct a sacrament service at a family gathering, nor to perform a baptism, confirmation or ordination at a time, site and situation of his own choosing. Instead, he seeks the necessary authorization before appropriately performing the ordinance.

Seeking and following priesthood authorization should not seem restrictive nor routine. Rather, it is an empowering demonstration of obedience and understanding that validates acting in God’s name.