

**The Role of the Unit Commissioner  
In L D S Units**

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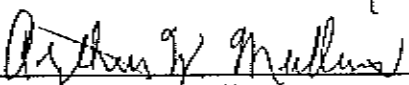
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**Piedmont-Appalachian College of Commissioner Science  
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Ridgecrest, North Carolina**

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To the Doctoral Candidate Review Board

I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by DeWayne Cox titled "The Role of the Unit Commissioner in LDS Units." I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

  
Arthur Mullins

We have read this Dissertation  
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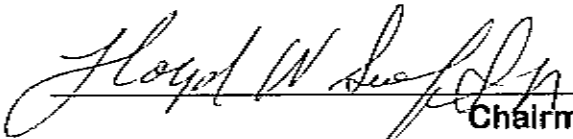
  
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## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Scouting in the LDS Church</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Goals for young men in the Church</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>History of the young men's program</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Development of the rite of passage</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>How Scouting applies</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Needs of LDS leaders</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Unit Commissioner's role</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>13</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

**The purpose of this dissertation is to give the reader a digested view of Scouting in the Young Men's Program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Also the Unit Commissioner's role in improving Scouting in that program. And hopefully develop a better understanding of other's cultural norms and goals. It is hoped that with better communication and knowledge that the young men of the Church (and the world of Scouting) will be better prepared to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

As Scouting enters into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Scout leaders are faced with an ever changing world. Things which were considered society's norms are changing with our "fast paced life." No longer are our local units made up of one social, economic, or cultural group. With an ever shrinking planet, a local unit can be made up of young men and leaders of diverse cultures and backgrounds. As Unit Commissioners, our "lot in life" is to insure that everyone has a positive Scouting experience. We may have to stop looking at Scouting just as a fun time in the woods, but look at Scouting as a "rite of passage" in promoting the highest ideals of our society.

Last year Mr. Davis and I had a short conversation about LDS units. It reminded me of a story about a young anthropologist, who went to the far north to study a herd of musk ox. After making camp in a small one room cabin, he found a local herd and introduced himself. He was warmly greeted by the head bull and chased up the nearest tree. After staying on the outskirts of the herd for several weeks, he was accepted by the herd. He could walk among them and the young calves would "play" with him. Under the supervision of their adults, he could join in their games by chasing them and scratching their ears. Sometimes the adults would let him scratch their ears. One day he noticed the herd seemed to be nervous. Things were not normal. When the bull snorted, the herd began to get closer together. As he watched, two "old maids" came out to him and began pushing him toward the herd. One of the cows stood at his side while the other butted him into the

center of the herd. Once he was in the middle, the adults formed a circle, standing side by side, with him and the calves in the center. As he looked around wondering what was going on, he saw a pack of lobo wolves heading toward the herd. He then realized that he had been accepted as a member of the herd as one of their children.

Many times, when we are given a new unit, we feel much as this young anthropologist. Not understanding what to do next or what we can do. As Unit Commissioners, our ultimate goal is “feeding” the young men and being sensitive to the needs of the units we serve. This is also the goal of the unit’s leaders. These units are made up of young men and leaders from many cultures and backgrounds. Just like the young anthropologist we may make mistakes and be treated as “children” until we learn the “path” and are accepted as part of the herd.

### **Scouting in the LDS Church**

Scouting plays an important part in the Young Men's program of the LDS Church. Three years after the Scouting program came to the United States (in 1910) the LDS Church made it a part of its Young Men's program. Today, Scouting still plays an important part in the Young Men's “rite de passage” in the Church. As a matter of fact, Scouting is so important that Church leaders have approved paying the registration fees, of its units, from

the tithing funds. Church leaders encourage Scouting in all Church units and have changed the requirements for the Church's Aaronic Priesthood Award to reflect some Eagle requirements affecting young men throughout the world. Church leaders consider scouting important enough to hold seats on the national council.

Young men begin Scouting at the age of eight as Cubs, which is also the age of accountability in the Church. As Scouts, they are encouraged to become First Class Scouts by the end of their first year. At the age of twelve the Scout takes an active role in the Church as a member of the Aaronic Priesthood and participates in Sunday services, which begins his road to the Melchizedek Priesthood and Church leadership.

#### **Goals for Young Men in the LDS Church**

The ultimate goal of the Church, for every young man, is to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood, marry in a temple of the Church, go on a mission, live good honest lives, and become responsible adults (Dahiquist, Satellite Broadcast, 2007).

#### **History of the Young Men's Program**

On 10 June, 1875, the young men's program was born with this goal in mind. By accident, or by design, the program developed within it a "rite of passage" for the young men of the Church. The term "rite of passage" refers



to any marking a transition in the life of an individual from one state or status to another.

#### **Views on Rites of Passage**

**“Rites of passage” serve as a means of passing on the norms of a Society. Not only is the initiate given knowledge to be successful as an adult but a positive attitude. In passing his ordeal, he gains a positive attitude that he can be successful at anything. It also prepares the adult of his society to accept him as an adult. As a child, he symbolically dies and is reborn to manhood and the world of men. In some cultures, the mother will gather her age mates and female relatives, shave her head, and mourn the death of her “little baby.” Paul Hill, Jr., a social worker in Cleveland, Ohio, states, “The failure of modern society to dramatize or take serious the need for such transition during adolescence has contributed to disruptive social groups such as youth gangs, and the mid-life crisis of the ‘unplaced’ persons” (Hill 1992:25).**

**In “primitive societies” one of the most important ceremonies is the “rite of passage.” As Miller put it, “. . . (Initiation ceremonies are) a systematic ceremonial induction of adolescent youths into the full participation in social life. . . . Such practices represent efforts to rivet the youth securely to the regnant social order and are devices for the development of social cohesion”**



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(Miller 1932: 49).

The Walbiri of central Australia on talking about the history of the initiation rites have two reasons for practicing subincision. "The reasons we split the penis . . . lie in the dreaming and are explained in the stories (of the initiation)" and also "Since we are kin to the animals and many of the animals split the penis, this is one reason why it is an important thing for us to have" (Cawte 1968: 962). Some Australian myths say that women invented circumcision (Henry 1944: 10). They also say that the rite of subincision for men necessitates a ritual for the women (Van Waters 1931: 75).

Two early theories about "rites of passage" were suggested by psychologists. These early theories were those of the "castrating father" and the "jealous mother." The "castrating father" was based on a theory by Freud who took it from Darwin. Freud is quoted, ". . . when I further took into account Darwin's conjecture that men originally lived in hordes. . . there rose before me out of all these components the following hypothesis, or, I would rather say, vision. The father of the primal horde, since he was an unlimited despot, had seized all the women for himself. . . we have conjectured that, in the early days of the human family, castration really was

performed on the growing boy by the jealous and cruel father, and that circumcision, which is so frequently an element in puberty rites is an easily recognizable trace of it." (Freud 1933: 120-121)

Most societies have similar elements in their initiation rites. The meeting is always presided over by a "general authority" which stresses the importance of authority and law. The rites always involve a process of indoctrination. This practice is held for all boys or girls of the society in which they must suffer some physical ordeal in the form of body mutilation or physical endurance. The opposite sex is usually excluded as a whole from the rite but sometimes barren women are allowed to help with the male initiation rites. There is usually an impersonation or representation of the tribe spirits or god.

During the ceremony the initiate goes through a ritual death and is resurrected a new adult with a new role to live in his society. All of this happens at a time of psychological vulnerability in the youth's life (Cohen 1964: 10-25; Van Gennep 1960: 65-115; Loeb 1929: 249-250). Both male and female rites share some of the above elements which are carried out by their sex group who have already been initiated but the female rites usually do not require the harsh endurance that prepares the males for future life. "Female initiation rites will occur in those societies in which the young girl

continues to reside in the home of her mother after marriage. The purpose of the rites appears to be an announcement of the status change both to the initiate and to those around her, made necessary because she spends her adult life in the same setting as her childhood. . . .Such rites will not be celebrated in those societies in which the young girl will leave her home and move to that of her husband's family, or to a new home removed from both families. The move itself serves to emphasize the status change to the young girl, and those among whom she will live will think of her as an adult, never having known her as a child" (Brown 1963: 841).

The structure of a "rite de passage" gives the people the opportunity to symbolize the elements that make a strong and united society. "The systematic instruction of the youth in sacred myth and tradition, the gradual unveiling of mysteries, and the exhibition of sacred objects" (Malinowski 1948: 21) insure the society and the initiates that society will continue.

The initiation rite prepares a young man or woman to face the future with a positive and good outlook on life. Young has stated that the male initiation rites convey proper sex behavior causing him (the initiate) to want to show his new role in his community, "promotes same-sex solidarity," and "strengthens cooperation in activities vital to the community's welfare" (Young 1962: 379-391). Many anthropologists believe that it is a round-about-

way to settle disruptive emotion in the young. Whiting believes, "Male initiation rites are deigned to curb disruptive emotions. . .those. . .arising from a male youth's conflict as to his sex identity and his consequent need to prove himself a man by exhibiting aggressive and antisocial behavior" (Whiting 1962: 392). The initiation rite gives the youth the opportunity to get rid of these aggressive tendencies without hurting the society. Afterwards the initiate feels himself a better person because the rite was a source of personal gratification, an experience of achievement (he can see himself as others see him), and helps to sustain his personal worth in the society (Schwartz 1968: 119).

The initiation rite also serves as a school of higher learning. It "teaches what kinds of values must be inculcated in the child for the preservation of the society's goals" (Cohen 1964: 11).

The initiation rite impresses upon the mind of the initiates the importance of the society and their support of it. Young says, "Although solidarity is a matter of degree, a crucial threshold develops when the men of a village come to see themselves as (an) . . . organized group with the power to exclude or discipline its members. . ." (Young 1962: 381). This solidarity is uninterrupted until "disobedience to tribal laws occurs only as a result of cross-cultural influences (which) reduces the power of the tribal elders" (Bettleheim 1955: 92).

Bettleheim also believes that the "initiation rites seem to be due to the efforts to integrate" (Bettleheim 1955: 24). It is the society's part in accepting into its midst and recognizing the youth as an adult in that society. The initiation plays an important part in the lives of the young people of a primitive tribe by preparing them for future life and teaching them the proper roles they must play to insure the continuation of the society. It is a means to "speed the youngster on his road to adulthood by transmitting to him the 'vital energy' of previous generations" (Speiser 1929: 195).

#### Applied to Scouting

Now that the reader is bored with the technical information about "rites of passage," we can see how Scouting can be considered a rite of passage in itself. Taking a look at the information about the rites of passage, adding Scouting, and applying it to the Young Men's program of the Church equals success in preparing youth for adulthood. Another important part of the success equation is the role of the unit commissioner.

#### Needs of LDS Leaders

Many Latter-Day Saint leaders grew up in the Church's Scouting program. But the further you get away from the "center stakes," many Scouters do not have the experience of a Scouting background. This background is a tremendous help in teaching skills, but being an adult leader is a different animal than the fun times of a Scout. New leaders, with a background or



not, can be intimidated by Scouters who have been in Scouting for “forty years.” As you and I know a background in Scouting does not always make a good leader. Some great leaders are “late bloomers” and gain a love of Scouting with their sons. Training is on the job. For the LDS Scouter, Scouting is a church calling. This means that he may be a Scoutmaster from six months to six years. He may also hold other “callings” in the church at the same time. Like many of us, life then becomes a juggling act between family, work, church callings, personal time, and Scouting. This arrangement can lead to an early melt down with nothing getting done or at best a half of a job getting done, at best. To prevent this and insure an excellent program, we have the Unit Commissioner. Many Commissioners assigned to LDS units may not know how to approach the “herd.” Or they may be intimidated by the Church’s reputation with Scouting. Education and knowledge have become “Gospel principles” for the Latter-Day Saint people. The only thing that will exasperate a Mormon is for a “gentile” to tell him what he believes. After meeting the “herd” and introducing yourself, get to the “head bull,” the Bishop. With the Bishop on your side, anything is possible. In the 2007 broadcast, the Presiding Bishop outlined four areas of improvement: Time, Tenure, Testimony, and Training (Dahlquest, 2007).

#### **The Unit Commissioner’s Role**

Since the Bishop is a busy man, he may need to be reminded (as all leaders). When issuing a calling, it is the Bishop's responsibility to determine the candidate's testimony. This interview should include his view of the Scouting program, his love of the young men, his willingness to magnify his calling, and the amount of time he can spend. The Bishop should know that it takes more than one hour a week. Not only is the time of the Scoutmaster important, but time must be scheduled in the Ward agenda for one weekend a month free for Scouting activities. Tenure is also important. Even though the Bishop may be tempted to release a good leader or give him another calling, encourage the Bishop to leave the Scoutmaster alone. The boys and the program need the continuity. Active participation in Scouting's extended programs like OA and district activities are a must. They can come home late Saturday night and be ready for Church participation on Sunday. Inviting and keeping him up to date on training opportunities for leaders and boys will give him the insight needed to support and expand the Scouting programs in the Ward. If the Bishop is "too busy," he has a Counselor over Scouting and may refer the Commissioner to that Counselor. But remember to keep the Bishop in the loop. The Commissioner should develop a working knowledge of all of the Cub and Scout leaders also, making sure the water gets to the end of the row.

The saddest comment that I have heard is, "Because of my Scoutmaster

I did not get. . . .” or “My leader was only concerned about his son and his friends.” Unfortunately it happens, but with active Unit Commissioners stressing training, tenure, time, and testimony it can be avoided. Then, when these leaders are released from their callings, there will be others trained to take over. They may also be good candidates for Unit Commissioners in their districts.

### Summary

If we see Scouting as a “rite of passage,” we may find that Lord Baden-Powell’s African experiences taught him more than we know. The young men of the LDS Church have become a strong influence in the world because of dedicated church leaders, local Scout leaders, and Unit Commissioners. Their high goals of excellence in the Scouting program have enabled our youth to reach for the stars.

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