

In a 2001 letter from the First Presidency, members were asked to assume greater responsibility for cleaning and caring for Church meetinghouses. That has been the resounding message from the Church's Physical Facilities department to Priesthood leaders across Australia. Seven years on the Pacific Area Presidency reiterated that message in their December 2008 letter indicating that this inspired program was "designed to bless the lives of all members by providing opportunities to serve".

Local Facilities Management groups play an important role in caring for meetinghouses; however they also visit with stake and district presidencies to encourage member participation. The fruits of those labours are now being seen right around Australia.



Each Monday morning the sisters gather together to clean the building.

In Kalgoorlie, Western Australia the success of the member participation program can be attributed to dedicated relief society sisters. In December 2008 the paid cleaning contract was not renewed at the request of the sisters. They believed that they could do a much better job. The brethren have also caught the vision and joined them. Specific cleaning and maintenance tasks are assigned and carried out.

"It all starts from the top," says Facilities Manager, Steven Menzie. "When you have a Bishop who is committed to the program he inspires his ward to be committed." The Footscray building in Melbourne, Victoria is proof of this. Bishop Jeff Wittington of the Footscray Ward has been the force behind the program. He believes that the benefits of the program are that members now take greater ownership of the building.



Richmond Ward youth clean chapel as part of their weekly Mutual activity.

The First Presidency has stated that Aaronic Priesthood quorums and leaders should play a prominent role in fulfilling the responsibilities of meetinghouse care. They can be assisted by the young women. By assisting in the program the Area Presidency believe that the youth can “deepen their reverence and feelings of respect for the house of the Lord.” Richmond Ward youth in New South Wales have taken up the challenge. As part of their weekly Mutual activity all of the youth, leaders and Bishopric join the effort to clean the building. Each quorum or class is assigned a specific area of the building.

When members know there is work to be done they generally rally to the cause as has been found by Facility Manager, Peter Nenke. Brother Nenke relates the story of a brother in the Devonport, Tasmania Stake who rang the Facility Management office to indicate that the hot water radiators needed cleaning. He was quick to ask if he could do the job. After performing that task this same brother called back indicating that a number of window mechanisms needed cleaning and lubrication, and he volunteered for that work as well.

The program is not limited to caring for meetinghouse interiors but extends to gardening and grounds care as well. Members had been invited to assist in the grounds care in the Nerang Chapel, Queensland reports Facilities Manager Neville Keung. One Saturday morning Brother Keung drove to the chapel and found Bishop Keith Adams of the Coomera Ward, with his truck there and a number of ward members weeding and clearing fallen branches around the building.

We may have been slow initially but members are now responding to the call to care for the 172 Church owned meetinghouses across Australia. From the ***Facilities Management Guidelines for Meetinghouses and Other Church Property*** we learn that “Member participation is to be organized and carried out under the direction of the stake presidency. Experience has shown that the need for extensive cleaning and other work is minimized when those who use the facility exercise wisdom, caution, care, consideration and respect at all times and when they clean up after themselves.”