

New Zealand Local Pages

A Time of Reflection

Elder F. Michael Watson

In the earliest record of holy writ we learn of the life and mission of our Savior, even Jesus the Christ. It was He who it was prophesied would come into the world. It was He who would provide for us the way, the truth, and the life.

By the prophets, the birth of the Savior was made known to the people of the Book of Mormon; also that the Son of God would come “to redeem all those who shall believe on his name” (Helaman 14:2).

From the eternal realms to an earthly sojourn, the Son of God came into the world. His mission is clearly defined in holy writ with the accounts of His teachings, His blessings and miracles, the Atonement in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His death and Resurrection for all mankind, nothing wavering in His desire to do the will of His Father, Almighty God.

Through careful review, we arrive at the tantalizing conclusion that credible history was not written by those who had only knowledge of events as recorded in books, but rather by eye-witnesses to those events.

In our day the Prophet Joseph Smith, in recounting his having been in the presence of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, stated: “I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it” (Joseph Smith—History 1:25).

It is a time of reflection as we stop for a moment from the hustle and bustle of life to consider



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the deeper meaning of sacred events that have transpired and continue even today to change lives.

It was the Savior’s solitary life which provided a pathway of happiness—an iron rod—for those that follow Him with a desire and willingness to take upon them His name, to always remember Him, keep His commandments, and follow Him into the eternities. “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself;

and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).

Those who have felt the touch of the Master’s hand somehow cannot explain the change which comes into their lives. There is a desire to live better, to serve faithfully, to walk humbly, and to be more like the Savior.

Many years ago the First Presidency provided a message to the children of the Church in every land. In part it stated: “When Jesus was born, . . . our Heavenly Father’s love was showered upon the people of the earth. He sent His greatest of all gifts, His Only Begotten and Beloved Son, so that we all may someday return to our heavenly home” (“Christmas Message to Children of the Church in Every Land from the First Presidency,” *Friend*, Dec. 1972, 3).

Reflecting upon these words, we have the opportunity to mirror that same love in our hearts as we reach out, have the desire to be a better person, and serve others as He would were He living among us.

The standard of truth given by a prophet states: “No unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecution may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:540).

The words of a hymn, penned from holy writ, give us the hope of the eternities and a better life:

Come Unto Him

*I wander through the still of night,
When solitude is everywhere—
Alone, beneath the starry light,
And yet I know that God is there.
I kneel upon the grass and pray;
An answer comes without a voice.
It takes my burden all away,
And makes my aching heart rejoice.
When I am filled with strong desire,
And ask a boon of him, I see
No miracle of living fire,
But what I ask flows into me.
And when the tempest rages high
I feel no arm around me thrust,
But every storm goes rolling by
When I repose in him my trust.
It matters not what may befall,
What threatening hand hangs over me;
He is my rampart through it all,
My refuge from mine enemy.
Come unto him all ye depressed,
Ye erring souls whose eyes are dim,
Ye weary ones who long for rest.
Come unto him! Come unto him!*

(“Come Unto Him,” *Hymns*, no. 114)

In the Lord’s service, the path is not always easy. It often requires sacrifices, and we will likely experience adversity, but in serving Him we will discover His hand truly over us.

And so in this time of reflection, it has never been about us, it has always been about Him. ■

Seminary Classes Teach Youth Important Lessons in Life

By Catherine Vaughan

This year marks the 100th anniversary of daily release-time seminary classes, which began in 1912 in Salt Lake City. Seminary classes are now established in 135 countries throughout the world, including 13 countries within the Pacific Area. Just over 10,000 students from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands attend early-morning seminary every school day, as part of the 369,373 seminary students who

are enrolled worldwide.

The early-morning seminary programme was introduced in New Zealand in 1969. Early-morning classes enable youth to learn and socialize together, and usually the classes are held in chapels or homes around the country prior to school. In addition there are small numbers of students who participate in seminary via home study, and more recently, in a pilot program helping home-study students

participate in seminary online.

Enrolment figures from 1969 to 2010 show that 16,900 students have enrolled in seminary classes throughout New Zealand over the years, of which 8,957 successfully completed the four-year programme with the required 80% attendance and graduated.

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counsellor in the First Presidency, said, "There are three powerful things seminary



The Harbour Stake home-study seminary class: Steve C., Matthew Y., Nathaniel D., Hannah A., and Hunter A. at their stake seminary graduation.

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can do. First, it puts young people together who share the same values. Youth like to be with others who share their faith and who love the scriptures. Second, it puts youth together with a teacher who has a testimony, and they can feel the fire of it when it is borne. Third, seminary gets young people into the scriptures.”

“Going to the scriptures to learn what to do makes all the difference. The Lord can teach us. When we come to a crisis in our life . . . we should go looking in the scriptures for specific help. We will find answers in the scriptures. The Lord seemed to anticipate all of our problems and all of our needs, and He put help in the scriptures for us—if only we seek it” (“A Discussion on Scripture Study,” *Ensign*, July 2005, 24, 25).

Seminary students put this to the test as they arise early, and with red pencil and scriptures participate in explaining, sharing and testifying of what the prophets have written. Many students have testified that strong bonds of friendship as well as strengthened testimonies have resulted from early-morning seminary.

Jeremy Higgins, an early-morning seminary graduate

later called to be a seminary teacher, recalled: “In my first year of seminary we studied the Book of Mormon. This truly was the catalyst for me gaining a REAL testimony of this amazing book. Naturally, my testimony of Heavenly Father, the Saviour and Joseph Smith grew from there in the years following. I truly believe that because of my participation in seminary and the wisdom of a wonderful teacher I went into my mission with an established foundation of faith and testimony rather than gaining my testimony while I was serving. I believe my first year in seminary was a major spiritual turning point in my life, and its effects continue to bless me today.”

Ashleigh Vaughan, the youngest of six children in her family, who all graduated from seminary explained: “Even though sometimes it was hard to get up so early, I was more awake during the day at school when I got up early to go to seminary than when I slept in and just went straight to school. My mind was clearer when I was in tune with the Spirit. I developed some great friendships with the other youth in my seminary class, and the

discipline I learned from early-morning study helps me now I am at university. The daily focus on the Saviour in the morning, and learning about His life, His example, and the way He loves me, made the rest of my day better.”

Her older brother Christopher Vaughan, who also graduated from seminary and was called as a seminary teacher the day he returned from his mission, added, “Attending seminary helped me to more fully understand the scripture in Doctrine and Covenants 88:124: ‘Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.’ I also learned that you need to practise what you preach. Your actions and example mean more to people than you may ever know. As a student, my testimony was strengthened by the love that the class had for the gospel, whether it was discussing scriptures, playing games, or bearing our testimonies. As a teacher, being able to share the gospel truths with the youth and seeing the light turn on with them has changed my perspective of teaching and increased

the passion I have for sharing the gospel. Seminary prepared me to be a better missionary.”

In an address to CES religious educators in 1977, President Boyd K. Packer, now President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, emphasized the importance of seminary by saying, “In the history of the Church there is no better illustration of the prophetic preparation of this people than the beginnings of the seminary and institute program. These programs were started when they were nice but were not critically needed. They were granted a season to flourish and to grow into a bulwark for the Church. They now become a godsend for the salvation of modern Israel in a most challenging hour. We are now encircled. Our youth are in desperate jeopardy. These are the last days, foreseen by prophets in ancient times.”

The four-year seminary programme devotes a year of study each to the Old Testament, New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants in conjunction with Church history. No better preparation for missionaries is possible than with seminary and institute. ■

Overcoming Difficulties to Attend Seminary

By Catherine Vaughan and Heleina Garisau

Home-study seminary classes are offered where geographic dispersion of students is so great that it is not feasible to meet on a daily basis. Home-study seminary students study daily, but meet only once a week as a class. The following is an example of the challenges faced by Heleina Garisau from the Raglan Branch and the blessings she received along with the students in her area who participated in the seminary programme with her:

“In 2007 I began thinking about seminary as my eldest child, Niyah, was in year nine at school. During my own school years at CCNZ we had been introduced to scripture mastery through singing, as Brother and Sister Butters had put the seminary scriptures to music. The scripture mastery songs I learned all those years ago are still fresh in my mind today. I felt compelled to gift this to my children.

“Brother Scott Butters, who was the Seminary and Institutes advisor over our area, had been travelling out to Raglan on a monthly basis to give the students a lesson. Due to the distance that seminary-age students in Raglan had to travel, it was difficult to hold a regular class. I shared my desire that the children be given the opportunity to have home-study seminary—with a commitment from me to support them. I have a testimony of the scriptures and of seminary and had the opportunity to participate in the programme as a student in home-study, early-morning seminary, and at CCNZ, where it was

part of the school curriculum. Accordingly, I was called to be the seminary teacher of the Raglan Branch in 2008.

“Over the last four years our numbers have waxed and waned. We began as a home-study group due to the distances involved. The Raglan Branch covers a large geographical area, and initially regular early-morning class was difficult to sustain. However, our family realised the only way that Niyah would be able to complete seminary and fulfil her busy high school schedule was to study the scriptures in the early hours, before the school bus arrived at 7:00 a.m. In our old character home with no insulation, we spent many a frosty morning propped up in bed working through the scriptures and assignments together . . . and she was able to complete each year with the required 80% attendance. Some of the other students weren’t as successful; only a couple managed to complete their requirements. I held weekly lessons and class activities for makeup work to be completed and then began inviting them to attend with Niyah and me in the mornings so they could keep within the required attendance. At the end of 2010 we made the decision to change from home-study to early-morning. This would be a huge undertaking, requiring some students to be up before 5:00 a.m to meet our 6:00 a.m. start time.

“I bear witness that the early-morning seminary programme is inspired of God. I cannot begin to share the gift it has been for me to look into the eyes of my students each morning and see the Spirit work in them. I did have one student who had 100% attendance on the home-study programme, and this I believe can

be attributed to his amazing mother. It was her commitment to completion that enabled him to complete with that percentage. I believe, through my experience, that this is the biggest factor in successful home-study—parental support.

“The 2011 seminary year was not easy, but I know the inspiration to change to early-morning was from our Heavenly Father. The testimonies of the students who were able to attend propelled them to another level. The nature of things discussed in class and the things discerned by the Spirit increased. The presence of the Spirit was more palpable, and having a daily focus helped to fortify those attending. The greatest witness that it worked was not in the numbers of students who completed seminary, but in the testimonies shared by those who have participated in the programme.

“We had two graduates last year, and I had the blessing of seeing my desire realised—having my daughter graduate from seminary. It was a humbling experience to have invited and assisted the seminary students to come unto Christ. The greatest role as a seminary teacher is to lead the students to Him. I am so grateful for my calling and for my love of the Lord. I am so grateful for the support from all those in seminary and institutes that kept me ‘keeping on’ when I felt as though I was failing miserably. I am so grateful for the scriptures that draw us and our precious youth closer to our Heavenly Father and our Saviour Jesus Christ. I am so grateful for our wonderful Church and the inspired leaders who pray for us and assist us.” ■

Setting Goals is Key to Success

By Angela McKee

Toa L., age 17, of Napier Ward, Hastings New Zealand Stake, has some good advice to offer the youth of the Church: “Stay committed to your goals, work hard, and be willing to sacrifice to achieve the things you want in life”.

Like most young boys, Toa wanted to be just like his dad when he grew up. His father, Longdon, was a boxer. Under the guidance of his father, Toa set goals, trained hard, sacrificed time with his friends, and balanced fitness workouts with his schoolwork and Church assignments.

The years spent training and counselling with his father helped Toa to reach one of his major goals when he won the title of NZ Amateur Junior Super Heavyweight Boxing Champion 2011, after competing in the NZ Amateur boxing championships in Palmerston North.

Toa acknowledges that his dad has been his mentor, his coach, and his biggest support in his boxing career and his life. His father is a dedicated



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Toa L. with his father after winning his national boxing title.

taskmaster, but believed that Toa had the ability to achieve his goal. Boxing New Zealand acknowledged that with his enthusiasm and effort, Toa had a great future in the sport.

Being a member of the Church in a competitive environment hasn't worried Toa. The recent win has helped him realise that living Church standards, especially the Word of Wisdom, has assisted his

success. He said, “To achieve a goal like this you have to be truly committed and be willing to make sacrifices.” One of the sacrifices Toa made to achieve his goal was to not go out with his friends during the weekend. He credits living the healthy lifestyle advocated in the Word of Wisdom with teaching him how to look after his body as an athlete. Growing up in a strong LDS family has

helped him to choose between right and wrong. He trains at least two hours a day—often more before a competition—but keeps the Sabbath day holy and

attends church with his family.

Toa is looking forward to taking his skills to the next level and is still making plans for the future. His next goals are to

represent New Zealand at the Olympic Games in boxing, and to represent the Saviour, as he plans to serve a mission for the Church. ■

Church Choir Sings at Waiata Maori Music Awards

By Angela McKee

The Waiata Maori Music Awards is held annually in Hastings at the Hawkes Bay Opera House. The awards were initiated to focus on the diversity and excellence of Maori music in New Zealand, and seek to develop, encourage and honour the achievements of outstanding traditional and contemporary musical compositions and performances each year.

Hastings stake high councillor Des Ratima took an opportunity to approach the organisers about having gospel music at the event. They agreed, and consequently 27 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Flaxmere and

Hastings stakes made up a choir with members ranging in age from 14 to more than 80 years old.

The *waiata* (songs) selected by Hastings stake choir leader Benita Mariekura were chosen because of their uniqueness to the history and people of the Church. The first piece, “*He waiata o te hunga i ora*” (or “*Kia kotahi*”) was selected from an old Church hymnbook that contained Maori songs. The second piece they sang was “*Kia Ngawari*”. This song held particular significance to Matthew Cowley, as a missionary, and later as a mission president during his service in New Zealand. Matthew

Cowley would say the words *kia ngawari* often when he preached. The words translate to “be sincere” or “be loving and kind” (see “*Kia Ngawari*,” *Friend*, Feb. 1972, 42).

The Latter-day Saint choir was the first gospel choir to participate in the Waiata Maori Music Awards. Sister Mareikura said that the feedback was very positive. Being involved in a national music awards evening helped raise the Church out of obscurity in the Hastings area. It gave members the opportunity to share gospel teachings and the love of praising God through music and song. Another door has opened for the Church to give service in the community. ■