

United Kingdom & Ireland

Inspired Invitations

By **Elder Erich W. Kopischke, Germany**

President Europe Area

Book of Mormon prophets foresaw not only the eventual destruction of their own people, but our times as well. Moroni said: “I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). Moroni and others knew of the pride that would exist in our modern world—pride that would lead to a multitude of sins (see Mormon 8:36, 37).

The prophets, ancient and modern, remind us that the solutions for disasters, personal distress, injustices, and the evils of the world lie in the gospel of Jesus Christ and its saving ordinances. They invite us to choose this day whom we will serve (see Joshua 24:15), and they exhort us to “come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift” (Moroni 10:30).

Our most precious gift from God—the one that sets us apart as His sons and daughters—is our agency. We can act for ourselves. However, “man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other” (2 Nephi 2:16).

Because there must be opposition in all things, the world is full of enticements. Advertisements, media, and the Internet offer quick fixes for everything. Much too often, these promises are not fulfilled. They serve the provider much more than the receiver, and people “are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men” (D&C 123:12).

Invitations that deceive others are born of evil. These are the temptations we face every day. The motivation to tempt others is always selfishness. In subtle ways evil invitations manipulate and coerce people, resulting in spiritual captivity or even addiction.

Real purpose and happiness are found in the invitation extended to us by the Saviour: “He inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33). Inspired invitations entreat people to do that which is good. Those extending them respect the agency of others and are motivated by love.

Nephi explained the role we play in extending the Saviour’s invitation: “Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given



Elder Erich W. Kopischke

it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance” (2 Nephi 26:27). To counteract the wickedness, temptation, and deception so prevalent in our world, all people need to receive inspired invitations born out of sincere love and concern for them. As we extend these invitations, many people will desire to accept them.

Last year we invited all members in the Europe Area to extend inspired invitations to family members and friends inside and outside the Church. We commend all who faithfully did so. Hundreds of lives have been blessed, both those who extended the invitations and those who responded to them.

A couple once told me how the grandfather of the family was baptised after many years of refusal. A granddaughter of

Primary age was celebrating her birthday, and her grandfather asked her: “What is your wish for your birthday?” She thought for a moment and said: “I wish that you would be baptised, Grandpa!” He was startled by the invitation and then said, to the surprise of everyone, “Okay.” He was baptised, and shortly thereafter the complete family was sealed in the temple.

Sometimes we refuse to invite because we fear a negative reaction or we have tried a thousand times before and we do not believe that people will change. We should not worry about the reactions of others—we are not

responsible for how they will respond. And we should not presume that people won’t change. President Thomas S. Monson has said, “Men change every day.”¹

I see increased growth of the Church in Europe contingent upon our ability to extend inspired invitations. We therefore again invite you to be part of a special experiment in June. Prayerfully study the principle of inspired invitations. Ponder it individually, with your families, and in Church classes. As you study and pray, the Spirit will guide you, and names will come to you. You will know how and to whom to extend an inspired

invitation. People will respond to your loving plea to hear the missionaries or come with you to sacrament meeting.

Our faith in Jesus Christ will increase as we give strong invitations to those we love. When we invite others to come unto Christ, the elect will hear and recognise the voice of the Shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life” (John 10:27, 28). My prayer is that we will extend invitations that will lead others to eternal life, which is the greatest gift of all. ■

NOTES

1. Quoted in Thomas S. Monson, “To the Rescue,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 49.

Our Family’s Experience with the “Month of Invitation”

By Leland E. Mayall

Our Area Presidency requested that we as a stake presidency encourage our members to invite their friends and associates to Church meetings and activities. We decided to designate October as a “month of invitation” for the Ashton England Stake.

On Sunday, September 4, 2011, President Kevin G. Fletcher, President Matthew R. Preston, and I stood on the top of Hartshead Pike at 7:00 a.m. on a typical autumn morning. As we looked out over our stake boundaries, we shared with each other our thoughts of the vision we have for this great stake. We stood huddled behind the beacon, sheltered from the wind and with heads bowed, as President Fletcher offered a prayer to our Heavenly Father on behalf of all of our stake members. He gave thanks and asked that blessings be poured upon each of us as we



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PRESCOTT

committed to make October a month of invitation.

That day I made a personal commitment that our family would use the month of September to prepare for the month of invitation. The next Monday we held a special family home evening in which we discussed our family’s vision for extending

The Mayall family holds family home evening.

invitations to as many as possible during October. We listed those we could invite and the events to which we would invite them. Each member of our family participated, from our youngest child, Rachel, age 5, to myself. We put our list of names and events on a piece of paper and placed it on the refrigerator door (the most used door in the house).

We then invited our full-time missionaries, both elders and sisters, into our home. We shared a message together and showed them our list so they could pray with us that we might have success in our efforts.

Results

Rachel invited her friend from school to attend church, and my wife, Berny, invited the friend's mum to come with her. The invitation was declined—for now.

Hannah, age 10, invited her friend to come to church with her. Berny invited her mum to attend with her daughter. Hannah's friend attended church and enjoyed it. Her mother declined to attend—for now.

The last Sunday of the month, Hannah invited another friend to church, and Berny invited that friend's mum. The mum kindly declined but allowed her daughter to come to church with us. She enjoyed the experience and already knew some of the Primary children from school.

Abigail, age 13, invited her friend to attend a special Young Women activity put together by the missionaries. She came to the activity and enjoyed the night. Her mum commented that she is glad her daughter and Abi are friends because she knows and appreciates the standards of our family.

Abigail invited another friend to attend the Young Women camp, and she accepted. At first her friend was homesick, but she stayed at camp. On Thursday night, we as a stake presidency attended the camp to preside at the testimony meeting. We each shared a message on the importance of virtue for our young women and emphasised

just how precious they are. The young women were then invited to share their testimonies.

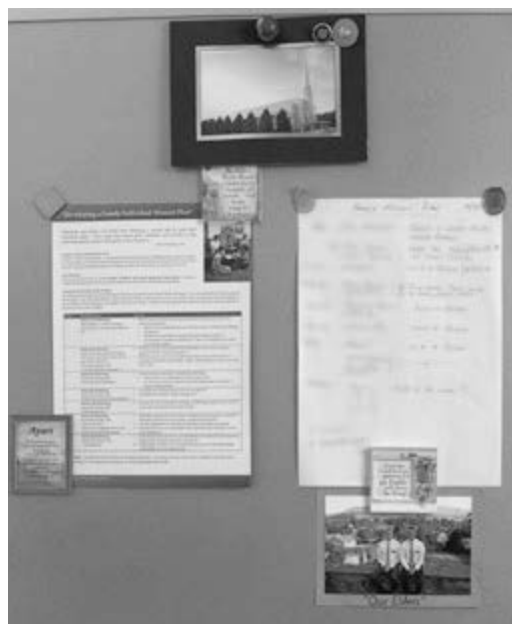
What a truly wonderful experience it was to witness these daughters of God share their feelings about the Saviour, His gospel and each other. Toward the end of the meeting, Abigail's friend

got up to share how much she had enjoyed the camp. She thanked everyone for making her feel so welcome, and she couldn't hold back her tears as she closed with, "Thank you for letting me come." After the meeting I went up to her, thanked her for coming, and told her how brave she was to stand up in front of everyone there. She smiled and then disappeared, being hugged by a group of teary-eyed young women.

We invited this friend and her mother to come to church with us on October 30, when the young women talked about their experience at camp. They called Sunday morning to say they couldn't come, but Abigail will invite her friend to attend a stake youth activity in the near future.

Leah, age 15, invited a male friend to a Church dance. She also invited a girlfriend to camp. The first friend went to the dance with Leah, my son, Nathan, and me. Her girlfriend couldn't attend camp due to other commitments.

Nathan, age 17, didn't have anyone on our refrigerator list—his project was to find someone. He had become close to the elders in our area and went out with them on a teaching appointment. Nathan and the missionaries met with a family of five, consisting of a mother and four children. The mother,



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PRESCOTT

The Mayall family's invitation list hangs on the refrigerator door.

one daughter (age 15), and one son (age 10) had committed to be baptised. At the end of the teaching appointment, the elders asked the son who he would like to baptise him and he said, "Nathan." When I picked up Nathan after the appointment, he was excited, nervous, and honoured. We had four baptisms in early October, one of which was my son using his priesthood for the very first time to baptise this young boy. What a blessing for me as a father to be able to witness this event!

My wife, Berny, invited several of the mothers of our daughters' friends to come to church with us. None of them have yet accepted her invitation, but all were grateful for being invited.

For my part, I tried to arrange an evening for us as a stake presidency to visit with some less-active members, but all four we had hoped to visit declined our invitation. Instead, I took a 22-year-old investigator to institute so he could visit with his peers. During the journey I had a great opportunity to talk about spiritual things with him. He decided to be baptised and asked me to perform the baptism. (Anything my son can do, I need to do too.)

I was prompted to extend an invitation to one of the players on the football team I manage and coach, a young man 20 years of age. I invited him to attend a devotional at Ashton on Lehi's journey. He accepted the invitation, and I had the opportunity before the meeting to teach him a few things about the Church and give him a Book of Mormon. My son and my younger brother, who also play for the same football team, sat with my guest to provide friendship and fellowship. Before we left the devotional, I introduced my guest to the full-time missionaries with the view of giving him the opportunity to learn more about the Church. I have yet to speak to him about being taught by the missionaries, but he did say as he left the meeting that "it felt good; it made sense; I'm interested."

My family has been such an example to me of the true spirit of invitation. We have had some disappointments along the way, but they have been

swallowed up in the successes we experienced. October was just the start. We now have our very own family mission plan and individuals to work with. We will have more opportunities to extend invitations, and I believe we will see individuals being taught by the missionaries progress to baptism or reactivation, and feel of our Saviour's love for them. I see the excitement in my wife's and children's eyes as they share with me their invitation experiences, and I know that the Lord is silently touching each of our lives. Sacred things are happening to us as a family as we are coming to understand our everyday opportunities to invite all to come unto Christ. ■

Mobilising the Ward Council to Extend Invitations

By Thibault Crucy

Last April the Nogent Ward in Paris, France, received the letter from the Area Presidency requesting that the month of June be dedicated to "inviting." The bishop and his counselors were thrilled by the power of the promises it contained. As requested, they read the letter in sacrament meeting. They also reviewed in ward council how they could best implement the "month of invitation" in their ward. The ward council took hold of this request and did the following:

- On the fifth Sunday in May, the bishopric presented a lesson on inviting in the combined priesthood and Relief Society meeting.

The Nogent Ward council meets and plans.





Pori Branch members and missionaries.

- The Primary prepared a special sharing time on inviting and encouraged all the children to watch over and help their neighbours.
- Both the Young Men and Young Women organisations presented a lesson on inviting.
- The high priests group, elders quorum and Relief Society worked together to assign each active member a less-active member to invite during June.
- A copy of the Area Presidency’s letter was sent to each ward member.
- Every Sunday each organisation gave reminders about the month of invitation.
- Each week the ward bulletin made mention of the month of invitation.
- The missionaries were invited to visit as many members as possible and encourage them to participate.
- In the middle of June, the bishopric sent an e-mail message to ward members to update them on the ward’s progress.
- Ward members continued to follow their ward mission plan, which included praying daily as a ward for missionary opportunities.

The month of June was full of miracles. Many members had success. One of them said, “The field is so white, that the fruits fall directly in the hand. We just have to stretch out the hand to pick them!” Not everyone enjoyed success, but all rejoiced in having tried and in seeing the success of others. On June 26th, the final Sunday of the month, 187 people attended sacrament meeting—about 50 per cent more than usual. As a result of the June month of invitation, the missionaries were able to teach several families. Some less-active members returned to Church as well.

The Area Presidency set a vision with their invitation to “invite” (see Proverbs 29:18). The experience in the Nogent Ward illustrates that when a ward council works together to bring to pass inspired challenges, great things do come to pass. ■

Member and Missionary Partnership

By Samuel Koivisto

When members of the Pori Branch in the southwest corner of Finland received the Area Presidency’s letter inviting them make June 2011 a “month of inviting”, they embraced this effort with all their hearts. In a spirit of prayer and faith, they began inviting their friends, family members and acquaintances to attend church with them.

Through the entire month of June they sustained this effort to invite. If their invitation was declined, they didn’t say, “Well, I’ve extended an invitation and have done my duty.” Instead, they continued to invite throughout the entire month. Some members of the community received more than one invitation to attend sacrament meeting.

The full-time missionaries assigned to the area also increased their invitation efforts, and several people accepted. They asked for help from members, and members eagerly responded. They provided rides for those who needed them, warmly greeted any visitors and sat with them during the meetings. Those who accepted invitations to come to church felt genuine warmth and love from those in the branch as they joined with them in worship. Branch members worked with the missionaries to create teaching opportunities. They opened their homes to those receiving missionary lessons and accompanied the

missionaries on their teaching appointments.

Underlying this invitation effort was an attitude of obedience, prayer, faith and persistence on the part of both missionaries and members. They were fully committed to accepting the Area Presidency's invitation to invite. They sincerely prayed to be aided in their invitation efforts and to know how to bless the lives of others, and they had faith that they would be blessed. They did not let one rejection deter them from extending invitations to others.

The results of their efforts were that on the last Sunday in June, this branch that averages

36 members at sacrament meeting had 11 visitors from other faiths—close to a one-third increase in their normal attendance. Through this endeavour, three people were baptised in Pori in 2011. Average teaching appointments for the missionaries serving in Pori increased from one per week to nine per week between June and November.

The Lord has truly poured out blessings on the missionaries and the members in Pori. These good Saints look forward to the day, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, when the Pori Branch will become the Pori Ward. ■

Seeking the Spirit to Extend Invitations

By Massimo De Feo

Last spring the Europe Area Presidency invited all members to follow President Thomas S. Monson's counsel to reach out to recent converts, friends, acquaintances, and family members and invite them to come to sacrament meeting during the month of June. Bishop Giulio Celestini of the Rome Second Ward and his family fasted about this invitation, and they prayed in a family home evening that they might know the family they should invite.

Their united efforts and the promptings of the Spirit led them to approach a family they had known for some time. They were not extremely close to this family but knew them well enough to feel confident that they would at least listen to their invitation.

As a first step, the bishop invited the family to join them in a family home evening, where he felt impressed to invite them to church. With a little hesitancy they accepted the invitation and came to church

Sister Celestini and Riccardo Celestini with the Valle family and Bishop Celestini.

the next Sunday. Their 15-year-old daughter, Veronica, began participating with the young women in their weekly activities, making friends with both the other young women and their leaders. A short time later the bishop visited the family with the missionaries, and they started taking the lessons.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAUDIO CELESTINI

One morning the bishop's wife met the mother of this family at an open market. When asked why she was shopping, the neighbour replied that she was buying a skirt to wear to church the next Sunday. She said she had observed that the sisters at church dressed in a certain way, and she wanted to show her respect to the Lord by emulating them. The bishop's wife ran home in tears and called her husband to tell him that she felt strongly that this family was ready for baptism.

The invitation to be baptised was made, but only Veronica accepted. The Sunday she was confirmed the bishop asked her if she would be willing to go to the temple to feel the Spirit and do baptisms for the dead. Four weeks later she attended the Swiss Temple with the stake youth. Upon her return, Veronica told her parents how happy she was to have been in the temple and testified of the Spirit she had felt there. They were obviously moved by her testimony.

The parents were invited to attend a special meeting where slides from several temples were shown. The bishop invited them to think about families being together forever, the significance of the temple in creating eternal families and the Rome Temple being constructed for this very purpose. They saw the pictures, felt the power of the Spirit as

they thought about how they could be united for eternity and decided to be baptised. They are now counting the days until they can be sealed in the temple.

All this happened because a bishop and his family felt inspired to extend an invitation to a family that was in their circle

of influence. This is, I believe, a great testimony of the combination of following the prophet's advice, exercising faith in the Lord, loving people, surrounding and embracing them with the arms of the Church family and helping them feel the spirit of the temple. ■

LOCAL NEWS

Upon the Islands of the Sea

"Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea" (D&C 1:1).

The Church is alive and well upon the "islands of the sea" in remote parts of the UK!

Kath Jones reported that David Jones, a lifelong member of the Church, was called as president of the Stornoway Branch on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides on 17 July 2011.

David had lived in England before relocating to the Isle of Lewis; he has settled and would not want to return to the mainland now.

Until the time of his calling as branch president, he had been serving as the priesthood instructor. David is very

focussed and committed to building up the Church in this corner of the Lord's vineyard. He is greatly indebted to his wife for all the support she has given him over the years.

The outgoing branch president, Eric Shaw, had been president of the Stornoway Branch one day short of 14 years prior to his release. His wife, Dorothy,



David Jones, the new branch president in the Stornoway Branch.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DERREN BRIDGE

continues to serve as the Primary president.

In the Shetland Islands, *Vikki MacDonald* reported that the most northerly branch of the Church in UK and Ireland, the Lerwick Branch, held a Festival of Nativities community event in December 2011. Gale-force winds meant that boats were cancelled from the smaller islands to the main island, but it didn't stop 80 per cent of their average sacrament attendance from supporting the festival. The real joy was that approximately two-thirds of the visitors to the festival were not members of the Church.

The event was intended to promote the true meaning of Christmas by exhibiting nativities from around the world. More than 100 nativities, donated by the local congregation and members of various churches throughout Shetland, were on display. Nativities from places as diverse as Bethlehem, the Philippines and Holland were included.

As well as the main nativity display, there were areas set up for children to participate in fun activities including dressing up in nativity costumes, colouring nativity scenes, creating nativities with modelling dough and decorating Christmas cookies. Despite the terrible weather there was a good attendance, and all who attended had an enjoyable time. It is anticipated that the festival will become an annual event. ■

Nativities donated by residents of the Shetland Islands were displayed at the Festival of Nativities held in December 2011 in the Lerwick Branch.



PHOTOGRAPH BY VIKKI MACDONALD

Nativities from many diverse places were displayed.



PHOTOGRAPH BY VIKKI MACDONALD

Children of the Lerwick Branch create a live nativity for the festival.



PHOTOGRAPH BY VIKKI MACDONALD

EDITOR'S NOTE

To submit all stories to the editors, Paul & Beryl Oliver, as "Word" files and photographs as "jpg" files please use the email address ukiensign@ldschurch.org. ■