

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

We Will See You Again

By Elder F. Michael Watson

Our journey through the Pacific has come to a close; we have referred to the Pacific as “Paradise,” “The Garden of Eden,” and “The Other Side of Heaven”. Memories will carry the love for people with whom we share a special kinship. A contemplative review of the time we have served in the Isles of the Sea has given much reflection to the sights and sounds of the beautiful vistas that open each and every day. These will be the June roses remembered in the December of our lives.

Meeting with the Saints in stake and district conferences as well as missionaries on mission tours were both important and rewarding as we had the opportunity to interact in the personal lives of priesthood and auxiliary leaders and felt the love and testimony from members. Such close associations with dear friends will remain as memories in our hearts that will provide solace to the soul then and now.

Travelling from one Island to another and throughout New Zealand and Australia, we observed the faith of the Saints to always be uplifting. We watched as they attended scheduled meetings, many times at great sacrifice, walking with weather-related challenges to worship and renew their covenants. We observed the remarkable singing talent of the Saints throughout the Pacific Area.

Public affairs provided insight, blessing both members and nonmembers who responded to the invitation to come and see what makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints such an important religious organization.

A documentary on the history of the Church in Samoa continues today to identify and strengthen the Saints whose heritage comes from this beautiful isle of the sea.

We wish to give special thanks to the many serving in the Area office, service centres, and throughout the Pacific. We have observed the “golden thread” interwoven with these sweet spirits who are giving daily service, and have been magnified in so many ways. They are a valued strength to the Area Presidency.

In addition to the Area office, senior missionary couples are also called to various assignments becoming as it were, an extended arm of the mission president to missionaries serving in distant places. For all the hours and love so freely given, they are destined to receive the reward of, “well done thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles summarized our beliefs in Jesus the Christ and sets forth the teachings of which we espouse in the doctrine of Christ:

He is the Light.

He is the Light of Bethlehem, born of Mary, His mortal mother, and His Father, Almighty God.

He is the Light who was baptized by immersion by John the Baptist, and upon whom the Holy Ghost was manifest in the Spirit.

He is the Light in whom His Father was well pleased.



**Elder F. Michael
Watson**

He is the Light at the head of the ancient church, organized with twelve apostles, prophets, and Seventies.

He is the Light of the Atonement fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Golgotha, who took upon Himself the sins of the world, that all mankind may obtain eternal salvation.

He is the Light of the empty tomb, the resurrected Lord, with a glorified body of flesh and bone, who broke the bands of death and gained an everlasting victory over the grave.

He is the Light that ascended into the heaven before the eyes of His disciples with a promise that in like manner He would come again.

He is the Light that appeared with His Father and restored, through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the same Church He established during His ministry here on earth.

He is the Light that leads and guides this Church today through revelation to a prophet, his counselors, and the Twelve Apostles.

He is my Light, my Redeemer, my Savior and yours.

President Thomas S. Monson, like those who preceded him, has declared his heartfelt testimony in these words:

“With all my heart and the fervency of my soul, I lift up my voice in testimony as a special witness and declare that God does live. Jesus is His Son, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. He is our Redeemer; He is our Mediator with the Father. He it was who died on the cross to atone for our sins. He became the first fruits of the Resurrection. Because He died, all shall live again. ‘Oh, sweet the joy this sentence gives: “I know that my Redeemer lives!”’ May the whole world know it and live by that knowledge” (“I Know

That My Redeemer Lives,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 25).

Now to the testimonies of the prophets, seers and revelators, I wish to add my own witness of these divine truths.

Over the span of many years in personal study and of time to ponder and pray, the promises of our Lord and Savior have been realized through personal and spiritual confirmations.

The prophets of the Old and New Testaments had strong enough testimonies to leave a legacy to follow, build upon and encourage others to see. The Church of Jesus Christ was restored in these latter days to become the organized source of light and truth, even the fulness of the gospel provided through Another Testament of Jesus Christ, the Book of Mormon. The priesthood of God was received and became the authority to act in His holy name.

The timeless events and experiences with our latter-day prophets of God whom we sustain only serve to cement our convictions. This is further bound by the eternal support and companionship of a beloved wife, the devotion of a loving family and the faith and prayers of wonderful people all over this vast world who have touched our lives deeply. As one of His especial witnesses, I add my testimony of these eternal truths.

With love to our eternal friends:

“We will see you again”

“Tatou toe feiloa’l”

“Ka tau toki fe’iloaki”

“Farerei faahou tatou”

“Nous nous reverrons encore”

“Eda na qai sota tale”

“Ti na manga kaitibo rimwi”

“Jenaaj bar loe eok”

“Bai mipela lukim u ken” ■

Faith, Miracles Open Doors for Australian Filmmaker

By Brett Stringer

Darran Scott, an Australian independent filmmaker and member of the newly formed Gippsland Stake, has figuratively shot the lights out with his faith-based basketball film *The Playbook*, at the LDS Film Festival in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Honoured with the opening screening slot, a rare second screening, and an award gong in the Best Screenplay category, Brother Scott says he was blown away by the reception his film received.

“I was completely humbled and overwhelmed by how warmly we, and the film, were received by everyone. From the organisers through to the critics and audiences, it really was a miracle,” he said.

Inspired by the story of Chris Williams, from the Mormon Messages video *My Burden Was Made Light*, *The Playbook* tells the moving story of Steven, a committed father trying to live a worthy life, whose family is shattered by a tragic drunk-driving incident. As he struggles to come to terms with the loss of his son

and his anger toward the drunk driver, he finds solace and eventually redemption through his

coaching service to his deceased son’s junior basketball team.

The film was shot entirely in regional Victoria, with many local members working as crew, and included a cameo appearance from three-time NBA Champion Luc Longley.

Darran Scott directs the action on the set of *The Playbook*.



IMAGE COURTESY OF IEN SCOTT AND USED WITH PERMISSION.



IMAGE COURTESY OF IEN SCOTT AND USED WITH PERMISSION.

Cast members of *The Playbook* with former Chicago Bulls player and three time NBA Champion Luc Longley.

Brother Scott, a counsellor in the Wonthaggi Branch presidency, enjoyed many miracles as writer, director, and producer of the film.

“Any endeavour we undertake in life just has to be better through the application of faith,” he said. “During this whole process, there has been obstacle after obstacle. There were certainly times when I thought those obstacles were insurmountable. Yet every time, through reliance on my Heavenly Father and the inspiration of heaven, obstacles dissolved, doors opened, and opportunities presented themselves. I am so grateful for this experience, and I hope that people can view the movie, be uplifted by it, and be encouraged that if we allow heaven into our lives, we can surmount anything. Making the movie and watching the Eternal Director guide me and clear the way ahead has been one of the spiritual highlights of my life.”

Brother Scott’s next project is a feature film about the Mormon Yankees, the group of missionaries in the 1950s and 1960s that opened many Australian doors to the gospel through their blending of basketball and missionary work. He adds, “I can’t wait to see what the Lord has in mind for this project.” ■

Modern-Day Pioneers

By Catherine Vaughan

Mention the word *pioneer* to a member of the Church, and it immediately conjures up visions of valiant Saints trekking across America, seeking a sanctuary where they would be free from persecution to live the eternal principles of the gospel they had embraced. The history of the Church is filled with heart-wrenching stories of the dedicated early members, who sacrificed the homes and comfort they knew and walked with faith toward the Salt Lake Valley, where Brigham Young had announced, “This is the place”. Heroic legacies of the hardship the early pioneers endured as they travelled through winter snow, navigating difficult mountain passes, confronting sickness and death along the way, illustrate the depth of their trust in Heavenly Father and the strength of their testimonies in the sacrifices they made.

The Church is filled with pioneers, many of them now surrounded by the technology of a

Heather Hawkins with her children, Ben, Sarah, and Jessica.



IMAGE COURTESY OF DAVID CAMPBELL IMAGERY AND USED WITH PERMISSION.

digital era. Though not called upon to walk a thousand miles, bury children by the frozen roadside, or donate all of their belongings to build a temple so they can partake of the sacred saving ordinances, the faith they exhibit and depth of their testimony-strengthening sacrifices is just as valid and inspiring.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Two companion qualities evident in the lives of our pioneers, early and modern, are *unselfishness* and *sacrifice*. . . . That same quality is evident in the conversion stories of modern pioneers. Upon receiving a testimony of the truth of the restored gospel, they have unhesitatingly sacrificed all that was required to assure that its blessings will be available to their children and to generations unborn.”¹

Heather Hawkins of Gosford Ward, Newcastle Stake, joined the Church when she was 17. She had been invited to Young Women by a neighbour, Louise Forthum, when she was 13. She felt “a great warmth” from the other young women when she first walked in, and so continued to attend each week.

Within a few weeks she began to attend church on Sunday. Heather’s conversion was a gradual process. After attending church for 2 ½ years, she realized she had her own testimony. She felt that by being baptized she would be doing what the Saviour wanted her to do.

It took another year for Heather’s mother to agree to her baptism. Heather believes the Lord had a hand in her mother changing her mind. Her grandfather, when talking to Heather’s mother, said he had never seen Heather look happier. After attending church for four years, Heather was baptized in the Newcastle Ward in

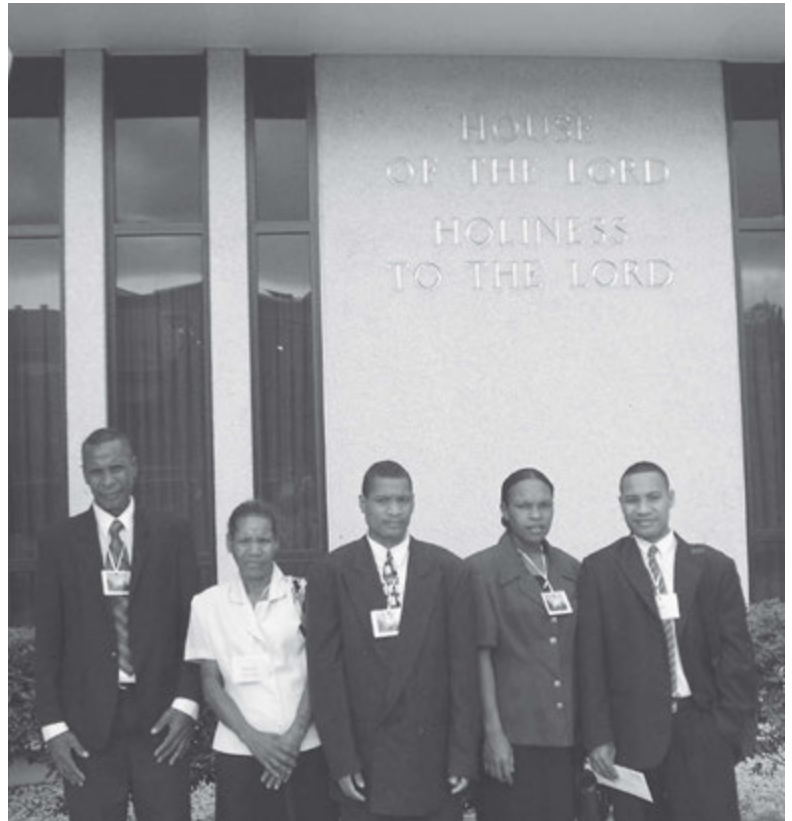


IMAGE COURTESY OF ANDREW KAU AND USED WITH PERMISSION

Left to Right: Brother Kau Motuka, Sister Gwavira Motuka, Diga Kau, Barbara Andrew Kau, Andrew Kau

March 1977. It was a joyous time for so many members who had seen her grow in the gospel.

None of Heather’s family attended her baptism, but it didn’t take away from the spirit of the day. She says, “That amazing feeling I had after receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost was indescribable. I just felt so clean, and so good—I knew I’d made the right choice.”

Heather married in the temple and had three children. Her son, Ben, served a mission in Japan and has since married in the temple.

“I’m glad I’ve stayed true to the gospel—I feel really blessed by being obedient. My son is

married to a wonderful woman, and my girls have hearts of gold, and I love them unconditionally,” Heather said.

“I know I wouldn’t be who I am today without being a member of the Church. I’ve grown and learnt so much. Attending Young Women taught me standards and guidelines on how to shape my life. I have had wonderful friends who have been great examples to me. The Church is an important part of my life—it has shaped every decision I make, because of the principles I learnt from when I first started attending as a young teenage girl.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley honoured the pioneer legacy when he said, “It is good to look to the past to gain an appreciation for the present and perspective for the future. It is good to look upon the virtues of those who have gone before, to gain strength for whatever lies ahead. It is good to reflect upon the work of those who labored so hard and gained so little in this world, but out of whose dreams and early plans, so well nurtured, has come a great harvest of which we are the beneficiaries. Their tremendous example can become a compelling motivation for us all, for each of us is a pioneer in his own life, often in his own family, and many of us pioneer daily in trying to establish a gospel foothold in distant parts of the world.”²

The Church is still relatively young in Papua New Guinea, with most of the membership being baptised in the past decade or two. Andrew Loii Kau, from Korobosea Ward, Port Moresby Stake, was the pioneering example that his father needed to change his life around. Andrew relates his conversion story: “My father was a smoker and a heavy drinker; he had a Word of Wisdom

problem. He grew up that way, and when he got married he continued to do the same. When I was in grade 8, I was introduced to the missionaries, and I was baptised and confirmed a member of the Church in December 1997.

“When my father heard that I was baptised into a church uncommon to my village people, he initially argued with me about it, but he watched me grow in church. Two years later he gradually stopped some of his bad habits. Finally, he was left with only one vice—his tobacco.

“He was truly amazed when I invited him to a baptismal service one day. After the baptismal service his mind was preoccupied with what he saw, but I could sense the Holy Ghost was teaching him something important.

“Two weeks later he asked to see the missionaries. The elders taught him the six discussions, and he was baptised within two weeks. He is a different father today. His family members could not believe he let go of all the things he partook of for over 30 years in his life.

“In October 2008 we all went to the Sydney Australia Temple to be sealed for time and all eternity. I know Heavenly Father really prepared my father, and He knew my father could change. My father is my mentor and teacher today. I love and adore him for the changes he has made in his life.”

Paruru Kukuma, from the Konedobu Branch in Papua New Guinea, was baptised along with her 12-year-old daughter in 2010. Persecuted by people from other churches when she was first baptised, Paruru was reluctant to tell her parents that she had joined a new church. She had been told by others that they would disown her if she

left the church she had grown up in. For several months, as she left for church each week, she would tell her parents that she was going to the church of her late husband, who passed away 11 years before. It was acceptable for her to visit there. During that time, Paruru and her daughter kept praying for Heavenly Father to touch her parents' hearts so that they would accept her decision to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She explains how that came to pass:

“One Sunday morning as my daughter and I were preparing to go to church, I heard a still, small voice telling me that it was the right time for me to tell my parents which church we were really attending every Sunday. I told them it was time for me to change my bad habits, as I wanted to become a better mother to my daughter, and I told them that I had found true happiness when I got baptised. I had the strength to tell my parents that no matter what they said about the Church, or about me, it would not change my mind, and I would not leave my new church. Surprisingly, both of my parents had tears in their eyes, and told me that if I was happy, they were happy too, and they accepted my decision to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Paruru continues, “It has been a blessing to be a member of the Church, and go to the temple. I love the Book of Mormon and the Church books and magazines. I love the conference editions of the *Ensign*, with talks from the prophet and apostles and testimonies from other Church members. They give me strength to continue my membership in the Church, and help me in my continuing spiritual growth.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles encourages modern Latter-day Saints to have in their footsteps the same dedication the pioneers had in theirs:

“We cannot begin to understand the journeys made by those who laid the foundation of this dispensation until we understand their spiritual underpinnings. Once we make that connection, however, we will begin to see how their journeys parallel our own. There are lessons for *us* in every footstep they took—lessons of love, courage, commitment, devotion, endurance, and, most of all, faith.”

He continues, “We will learn, as did our pioneer ancestors, that it is only in faith—*real* faith, whole-souled, tested and tried—that we will find safety and confidence as we walk our own perilous pathways through life.

We are all bound together—19th- and 20th-century pioneers and more—in our great journey to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and to allow His atoning sacrifice to work its miracle in our lives.”³

“We must be sure that the legacy of faith received from [the pioneers who came before us] is never lost. Let their heroic lives touch our hearts, and especially the hearts of our youth, so the fire of true testimony and unwavering love for the Lord and His Church will blaze brightly within each one of us as it did in our faithful pioneers.”⁴ ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Following the Pioneers,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Faith of the Pioneers,” *Ensign*, Jul. 1984.
3. M. Russell Ballard, “You Have Nothing to Fear from the Journey,” *Ensign*, May 1997.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Faith in Every Footstep,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996.

Silent Prayer

By Lisa Dunbar

I was a missionary in Sunbury, Melbourne in 1989 when my companion, Sister Purcell, and I decided to visit an investigator. It was dark when we pulled up in front of his house in a street lined with lights on the opposite side. My companion volunteered to say a prayer before we went in to meet our investigator.

I am deaf and have been since I was born. Communication has always been an issue for me. That evening the light was very dim, and I realised that I wouldn't be able to read my companion's lips as she began to say a prayer.

I quickly asked Heavenly Father to help me understand the prayer, and I was immediately overcome by the Spirit whispering into my ear with a gentle soft and clear understanding what was being said.

Oh, how beautiful that moment was. I have never had the opportunity to close my eyes and actually hear what other people were saying. Yet I heard every word she said. It was a blessing, and deeply touched me, as I understood the clarity of sounds that hearing people hear every day. That special evening taught me to have faith in order to be able to understand things, just as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). ■

Community Service

By David Hoare

The Sunbury Ward recently provided a collection of food and other non-perishable items for the Wesley mission in Melbourne.

Sister Paula Collett arranged for the collection of non-perishable food items by inviting members to donate what they could. Many items were collected including food, baby items, toiletries and treats.

"The Wesley mission has been helping those in need for many years, and we felt that we could participate and partner with them by helping those who are struggling," she said.

"We collected and filled seven boxes locally and were glad we could make a small impact. We are grateful for the opportunity to do something in the local community, and for our ward members to help and care in this way in the community." ■