

AFRICA SOUTHEAST AREA LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Are You with Me?

By President Carl B. Cook

First Counsellor in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency

I was young and inexperienced when I was called to be a bishop. I had never attended a ward council meeting or a priesthood executive committee meeting. My family had lived in the ward for only nine months. There were many capable, seasoned high priests in the ward. I was serving as advisor to the teachers quorum.

After I was sustained as bishop, I met with the teachers quorum one last time. One of the young men said, “My mother says you are too young to be the bishop.” I couldn’t have agreed more! I felt young, but I also knew that the Lord had called me. I explained to the young man that though I felt inadequate, I planned to do my best and exercise faith that the Lord would help me fulfil my calling.

That same evening I received phone calls from several of the high priests in the ward who were long-time residents of the area. They knew I was reared in a neighbouring community that had often been at odds with theirs. They lovingly set aside any prejudice about my background and expressed their confidence in me as one called by the Lord. They pledged to sustain and support me. That was a great blessing in my life. Feeling their love and support gave me courage, and I moved forward in my calling with increased faith.

Accepting God’s Chosen Leaders

When Elisha was called to succeed the prophet Elijah, some “fifty men . . . went, and stood to view afar off” watching and waiting to see what would happen (2 Kings 2:7). Perhaps they didn’t want to sustain the new prophet until he proved himself. Elisha eventually performed many miracles, including parting the waters of the Jordan

River. Throngs of people followed him. No doubt, all who eventually followed Elisha were blessed, including those who first watched and waited. But imagine the increased blessings given to those who exercised faith and immediately accepted Elisha as God’s chosen leader when he was called.

In the Book of Mormon, God chose Nephi to rule instead of his elder brothers (1 Nephi 3:29). The people were promised that if they would keep the commandments and follow Nephi, they would prosper in the land. If they did not, they would be cut off from the presence of the Lord (1 Nephi 2:19–21).

Some did not accept Nephi as their leader. A few days after Lehi died, Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael became angry with Nephi (2 Nephi 4:12–13). They actually sought to kill him: “Our younger brother thinks to rule over us . . . now let us slay him . . . for behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule . . .” (2 Nephi 5:3). Knowing their plans, the Lord instructed Nephi to flee into the wilderness with all those who would go with him (2 Nephi 5:5).

In essence Nephi had to approach each of his family members and ask, “Are you with me?” All had to decide whether or not they would follow Nephi as God’s chosen leader. Some people chose to follow Nephi and some did not. “Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who



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would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words” (2 Nephi 5:6).

It must have required great faith for the people to follow Nephi and leave family members behind. Many of us face similar challenges today. Both then and now, those who have faith in the warnings and revelations of God choose to hearken unto the words of His ordained leaders. The Lord has said, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). We must follow our leaders as though God himself were speaking to us.

Subsequently, Nephi and his followers journeyed in the wilderness for many days before pitching their tents (2 Nephi 5:7). Nephi taught the people divinely inspired principles from the scriptures (2 Nephi 5:12). He caused them “to be industrious, and to labor with their hands” (2 Nephi 5:17). He taught them self-reliance (2 Nephi 5:11). The people did “prosper exceedingly” (2 Nephi 5:13). In essence, the Lord used Nephi to teach the people to live “after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27).

Nephi said, “Those who were with me . . . did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things” (2 Nephi 5:9–10). Their obedience brought blessings. Nephi built a temple so the people could receive saving ordinances for themselves and their families (2 Nephi 5:16). Their decision to follow Nephi clearly affected their eternal salvation.

What about Laman, Lemuel, the sons of Ishmael, and their families? The non-believers had been warned that if they would not hearken unto Nephi’s words they would be “cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence” (2 Nephi 5:20). And later, “Because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety” (2 Nephi 5:24).

Following God’s Chosen Leaders

In effect, our priesthood leaders ask each of us today, “Are you with me?” when they extend callings, invite us to repent, or challenge us to pay a full tithing. We are “with them” as we respond positively to their encouragement to have personal prayer, family prayer, scripture study, family home evening, and so forth. These leaders speak on behalf of the Lord. Those who follow God’s inspired leaders receive great blessings. Those who reject His leaders, or disregard their counsel, reject God.

Many of our units in the Africa Southeast Area are led by young, relatively inexperienced priesthood leaders. Mission presidents and Area Presidency members often begin their service with limited prior experience. The Lord chooses whom He will work through to accomplish His purposes. The effectiveness of all of God’s leaders, old or young, experienced or inexperienced, depends upon how we as members support and sustain them.

Joseph Smith received a revelation in 1830 exhorting Church members to follow the Lord’s prophet and “give heed unto all his words and commandments . . . ; For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith” (D&C 21:4–5).

When we follow God’s chosen servants we are promised “the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory” (D&C 21:6).

Leaders and followers alike are blessed when we follow God’s ordained leaders. President Thomas S. Monson has said to members of the Church, “We are one with you in moving forward this marvelous work. I testify to you that we are all in this together and that every man, woman, and child has a

part to play. May God give us the strength and the ability and the determination to play our part well” (Thomas S. Monson, “Until We Meet Again,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 108).

Let each of us demonstrate to the Lord and to our priesthood leaders, by our words and deeds, that we support God’s chosen servants. May they never have to ask, “Are you with me?” ■

New President Called for Johannesburg South Africa Temple

By Sister Karen Belliston

Robert Eppel has been called to serve as president of the Johannesburg South Africa Temple, beginning November 1, 2013. His wife, Pamela Anne Eppel, will serve as the temple matron. They are replacing Kenneth S. and Muriel Dorothy Armstrong, who have served with great devotion for many years. Elder Armstrong has been the temple president since November 2010 and, before that, was a counselor in the temple presidency since 2007.

Robert Eppel was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, to Harold Eugene and Margaret Hannan Eppel in 1945. He moved with his family to Zimbabwe when he was seven years old. A special memory of his father was that he sang whenever he could. Robert learned from him that singing is a good coping method when life gets hard.

The Eppels were married in Zimbabwe in 1967.

Robert qualified as a Chartered Accountant, and in 1972 the couple, along with two young daughters, moved to Port Elizabeth for employment. There they attended the Church of England, but he recalls thinking that “something was missing.” One evening in 1973 he found two young LDS missionaries on his doorstep. He agreed to hear their message. As he learned the gospel, he said, “I found a people who believed and lived the commandments.” After reading and pondering the Book of Mormon, he received a confirmation of its truthfulness and was baptized in 1973. Three months later, after moving back to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Pam was baptized as well. They were sealed in the Bern Switzerland Temple in 1974.

In 1981, Robert began working for the Church in Johannesburg as a regional manager. He later became director for temporal affairs, first for the Africa Area,

then for the Africa Southeast Area, and finally for the Africa West Area in Accra, Ghana. He and his wife have recently served a mission as Area auditors in the Africa Southeast Area Office in Johannesburg. They have both served at the Johannesburg Temple while on their mission.

Robert has served as a branch president, a counselor in bishoprics, and president of the Roodepoort and Soweto Stakes. His wife, Pam, has taught seminary and institute, and served as ward Relief Society president and stake Young Women president. They have five children and twenty-eight grandchildren, four of whom are currently serving LDS missions. ■



**President
Robert and
Sister Pamela
Anne Eppel**

ELDER TOM GREEN

Rwanda's First Missionary

By Brent and Cheri Andrus

We met Jackson Ndayambaje in the summer of 2010 soon after arriving in Rwanda as the country's first missionaries. Elder Jackson was born in Kampala, Uganda, and became an orphan at a young age because all his family members died. In spite of losing his family, he maintained a bright outlook at life.

A young American who was doing humanitarian service in Rwanda rented a room where Jackson lived. He saw in Jackson a special young man with a good heart and great faith. He invited Jackson to our Sunday church

meeting. Soon after he attended, he was taught the gospel and got baptized in October 2010. Jackson was bright and insightful. He regularly attended Sunday meetings, institute classes, and other church activities.

Soon after his baptism, Jackson joined nine other young members in the branch's first missionary preparation course and submitted his missionary application. Jackson used his savings for his mission expenses. He received his call to serve in the South Africa Johannesburg Mission and departed for the South Africa Mission Training Centre (SAMTC)

in January 2012. He represents the Church as the first missionary from Rwanda. While in the SAMTC he attended the temple for the first time to receive his endowment. He experienced the joy of being sealed to his deceased parents and performing temple ordinances for his family.

Elder Jackson Ndayambaje currently serves as a zone leader and has enjoyed tremendous success. He has a burning desire to share the joy that he experienced as a new member of the Church. He set an impressive example for members in his branch back home, with three more Rwandan elders currently serving missions. ■

Elder Jackson pointing to Rwanda on the African continent map



The Weak Become Strong

By Sister Ruth Naylor

Luke Padoa was born on April 13, 1991, in Springs-Johannesburg, South Africa, and has lived his entire life there. In July 2012 Luke was set apart as a service missionary to the Parktown Family History Centre. He received his endowment at the Johannesburg Temple. The senior missionaries awarded him with a South African tie similar to the ones they wear. Luke arrives every Tuesday morning before any of the missionaries and begins assisting patrons with their family history. After senior missionaries hold their devotional, they all eat homemade treats that they have brought.



Luke at the Parktown Family History Centre with his South African tie hanging on his shoulder



One of Luke's paintings

Luke plans to continue serving for as long as he is able. He is a wonderful friend to the senior missionaries and loves to hide in the centre and have the missionaries find him. Why is it that the missionaries love him so much?

Elder Padoa is confined to a wheelchair after being diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) at the age of three. DMD is a rapidly progressive form of muscular dystrophy that occurs primarily in boys. He has gone through several painful operations and never complains. Everybody treats him as a normal person, and he does not consider himself handicapped. He does all that is possible to enjoy life and serve in the Church. He loves spending time with his father. They enjoy going hunting, playing video games, and flying remote airplanes together. When Elder Padoa is alone, he spends most of his

time reading the scriptures and good novels, looking after his dog, and using his phenomenal artistic talent to draw animals for greeting cards to help pay for his wheelchair batteries.

Certainly, Elder Padoa exemplifies to people throughout the world the words of Ether 12:27: "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them." ■

Gathering of the Madagascar Saints

By Elder Kevin Ray Moore

Many changes for the better began to happen in Madagascar as the members caught the vision of striving for temple blessings. The nearest temple to them was in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2200km across the Mozambique Channel. Securing such blessings required many of the Saints to make significant personal sacrifices and exercise great faith.

As a missionary in Madagascar until June 2013, I had the privilege of helping and witnessing this great work. One afternoon during a meeting with the local church leaders, our mission president called and informed us that he felt the Besoa group of 35 members should be rejoined with the original Manandona Branch, 6.5km to the south.

Missionaries and members walking an hour and a half to Manandona to attend church





Swarms of locusts that passed through the valley

He asked us to begin preparing the people for the sacrifice they would be asked to make. This change would require the Besoa members to hike three hours round trip to the Manandona Branch for all of their church meetings. We were somewhat surprised, but began to make the special effort of strengthening the faith of the members of that area. We wanted to help them have a sure knowledge and testimony of fundamental Church doctrines such as faith in the Lord and in His leaders, the keys of the priesthood, and the blessings that come from obedience. After two months of regularly visiting and giving specially prepared lessons to all the families, we felt that the members were ready. All but a few had made attending the temple a priority and were preparing to make the sacrifice to travel to South Africa. We felt that the gathering of this group of Saints could occur soon.

Our mission president came on April 14, 2013, to meet with the members in Besoa. There was a special feeling as we walked through the rice fields to the wooden chapel for the last Sunday service that would be held there. Everyone came and

Elder Moore (left) with former Besoa group president Richard Rakotonirina (right)



greeted us on the path with beaming faces. The meeting commenced, and when the time came, our mission president announced the gathering of the Besoa Saints back to Manandona. Many members were unsure, as the three-hour hike seemed like too much of a weekly sacrifice. Yet, when we returned later that week, we found greater optimism and increased faith. Many were cheerful as they said they would make the hike. Brother Richard Rakotonirina, recently released group president, confidently stated to us that he was going to take his family to the temple and would not let such an obstacle stop them. We decided to accompany the members on their first Sunday on the rugged road that wove 6.5km through the mountains and fields to the Manandona Branch building.

Twenty of the 35 members made the transition that day, including many who struggled in their faith before. There were children as young as two years old with their parents and grandparents, the oldest of which was 75. In the following months, more members started coming. Manandona's branch leaders were still visiting and praying for the last few stragglers.

Not two weeks after the change was made, swarms of locusts began to plague the surrounding areas, but not in this valley. As is sung in the hymn, “Praise to the Man,” “sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven.” That was only one of several swarms of locusts in the coming weeks that spared this valley but destroyed the crops of valleys nearby. I witnessed one swarm begin to settle in the fields, but as they began to consume the crops, a strong east wind picked up and drove them out of the valley. After the locust swarms were past, 40 armed robbers from the south began to steal cattle, slowly moving northward. Many people made plans to leave if necessary, but the Saints expressed their faith to us that the Lord would protect them. He did, through a

sudden and unexpected cold spell which drove the robbers back to the more temperate desert in the south.

The Saints were blessed yet again when a rare hard frost came one night and lasted well into the day. Many people’s potatoes withered away, but not those of the Saints. The branch president of Manandona was accused by his neighbors of using magic, but he responded simply that he kept the commandments of God.

It was a great witness to me to see the increase in faith and commitment of those Saints in Besoa. It was not a simple sacrifice for them, but it brought forth great blessings. I pray that it will eventually help bring forth one of the greatest blessings of all: having the blessings of the temple in their lives. ■

From Institute to Mission

By Elder Jean-David Kasonga Mvita

After I got baptized on December 24, 2006, I took an interest in religion and prayer. At church I learned about the Institute of Religion. A teacher in my ward, a returned missionary, told me that institute was an appropriate place to learn about the doctrine of Christ and His Church. Attending institute would also qualify me to serve a full-time mission, which is a duty of all male members who hold the priesthood.

The idea of leaving my family for two years made me sad. I decided not to attend institute in order to avoid being qualified to

serve a mission. That way I could always stay with my family.

One year passed by. When school started in 2007, my bishop invited each Young Single Adult from our ward to attend institute. I attended along with the others. On the first day, I was assigned to be the class president, which I unwillingly accepted. However, when I started fulfilling my responsibilities and encouraging the youth to enrol, I was strengthened. The Institute of Religion became my center of interest; my knowledge of the gospel and my desire to serve others increased. For four

years I had nearly 100% attendance at institute, and I even became a seminary teacher.

In 2010, during an interview to obtain the Institute of Religion certificate, my stake president, Jean-Claude Mabaya, asked me a simple and direct question: “You are now graduating, and so what is next?” I remained silent, thinking for at least two minutes, and then answered, “As I freely received, I also want to freely give. Therefore, I want to prepare myself to serve a full-time mission.”

Today I am a full-time missionary in the Democratic Republic of Congo Lubumbashi Mission. When I share the gospel of Jesus Christ, I feel that institute



Elder Jean-David Kasonga Mvita

TEYAVA CHRISTIAN

prepared me in such a way that even doctors in theology take time to listen to me. I had the opportunity to teach a university professor who pretended to know the gospel, but he felt unequipped before me and other missionaries. Because of my attendance at institute, many people now have the opportunity to receive the message of the restored gospel. Through these experiences, I too am growing. No educational institution could give me the education that I am getting here on my mission.

I often ask myself what would have become of my life if I had not made the Institute of Religion my center of interest and served a full-time mission. I am immensely grateful to the Lord for His love and His Atonement.

I invite all adults to join this marvelous institute program and to heed the call from the Prophet to make institute one of their priorities. ■

Elder Mvita is from the Masina First Ward, Masina Stake, Kinshasa, DR Congo.

From Seminary to Mission

By Elder Nigel Lipengah

I was enrolled in the seminary program in 2007, three years after my baptism in the Church. My brother, Raymond, and I attended early-morning seminary daily at 6:30 before school. After a year Raymond started institute, and I had to go alone to seminary. I had every reason to stay at home in my nice, warm bed. It was a long distance to seminary in the cold, freezing, dark, winter mornings . . . all alone. Since my brother had a firm testimony of attending seminary, however, he gave me a gentle push and boldly told me that I must work hard and

graduate from seminary. From that day forward, I did fight really hard for that graduation diploma; but it is only now that I realize how much spiritual light I was blessed with from his gentle push that made me walk through those dark, winter mornings.

It is only now that I realize what I was actually fighting for—a testimony of my own, a testimony I have been blessed with, a testimony I got from attending early-morning seminary class. It is the testimony I carry with me now as a full-time missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ



Elder Lipengah pointing to photo of his brother when his brother was in the MTC.

of Latter-day Saints. It was this testimony of light and truth that made me decide to serve God as a missionary for two years. Seminary has been designed to shape and prepare us in ways we will never think of . . . just like it did for me. ■

Elder Lipengah is serving in the Uganda Kampala Mission. He is from Mkoba Second Ward, Zimbabwe.