

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

The Life-Changing Blessings of Full-Time Missionary Service

By Elder Peter F. Meurs of the Seventy

In 1957 Elder Ericson and Elder Jones were sent to Warrnambool, Victoria, Australia as the first missionaries. They had tracted diligently for three months with little success before knocking on the doors of the last street in town—Jamieson Street, where my parents lived. My father had grown up in a strong Catholic family in Holland. My mother was from a Christian Australian family. They were actively praying and searching for the truth when the missionaries knocked on their door. They welcomed them, and then recognised the truth of the gospel immediately from their previous study of the New Testament. Now as multi generations of the Meurs family grow up in the Church, we will be forever grateful for Elder Ericson and Elder Jones—faithful and diligent missionaries who continued searching for the pure in heart until almost the last door, on the last street in Warrnambool.

In 1974 I was serving as an assistant to Bishop Hank Kruizinga in the priests quorum. He was a strong influence in my life and actively helped me to prepare to serve a mission. I was planning to study engineering and wrote to the faculty requesting two years' deferment from my course work. They responded that I would automatically lose my place if my absence extended beyond one year. I decided that it was important for me to pursue my education and that I therefore would not be able to serve a full-time mission.

In October that year I was sitting in the Caulfield Ward chapel in Melbourne listening to the priesthood session of general conference by telephone link. President Spencer W. Kimball spoke about the boy David and the Goliaths all of us face in our lives. Then, I distinctly remember that as he said these words it was as though he was speaking specifically to me: “May we remind you young men again, your responsibility is to respond to that call. And if you receive a call from the Lord through your bishop and stake presidency, it is your privilege, but also your obligation, to fill that calling expertly. . . . Will [you] now establish your goal to fill a mission.”¹

For me a prophet had spoken, and through the very strong promptings of the Holy Ghost I knew then that I should serve a mission, and that the Lord would provide a way. That is exactly what happened. I put in my papers, received a call to serve in the New Zealand Auckland Mission and wrote back to the university advising them that I would need to defer for two years. Just before I left for New Zealand, they wrote back and accepted my request.

My mission experience changed me forever. Living for those you teach, deeply engaging in the scriptures, being taught and assisted by



Elder Peter F. Meurs of the Seventy

wonderful mission presidents, and serving with companions from every walk of life has continued to bless me even until today. I have had many opportunities in the business and engineering world. Whenever I am asked where I learned the principles that have assisted me to be successful I say that it was the experience of being a full-time missionary for two years in New Zealand that blessed me the most.

In our day, under the direction of a living prophet, Thomas S. Monson, we have once again been reminded of the importance and blessing of serving full-time missions. In October 2010 general conference he said: “May I mention a matter close to my heart. . . . First, to young men of the Aaronic Priesthood and to you young men who are becoming elders: I repeat what prophets have long taught—that every worthy, able young man should prepare to serve a mission. Missionary service is a priesthood duty—an obligation the Lord expects of us who have been given so very much.”

Speaking to the young women he added, “A word to you young sisters: while you do not have the same priesthood responsibility as do the young men to serve as full-time missionaries, you also make a valuable contribution as missionaries, and we welcome your service.”²

As individuals, families and leaders have responded to a prophet’s voice across the Pacific, hundreds of additional young men and women have entered the mission field, changing their lives and those that they teach forever.

In October 2012 at the opening session of the October general conference, President Monson delighted the entire Church with an announcement of a reduction in missionary age. He said,

“I am pleased to announce that effective immediately all worthy and able young men who have graduated from high school or its equivalent, regardless of where they live, will have the option of being recommended for missionary service beginning at the age of 18, instead of age 19.” And with respect to young women, “Worthy young women who have the desire to serve may be recommended for missionary service beginning at age 19, instead of age 21.”³

Young men and women across the Church have responded to a prophet’s voice. To accommodate these new missionaries, in July this year 58 new missions were created. By August 2013 missionary numbers across the world had already increased to more than 75000.

So what can we do to more fully follow the leadership and teaching of a prophet of God?

May I suggest:

Young men and young women—in addition to personal prayer and scripture study you can actively participate in new curriculum classes at home, and at church. These classes will greatly assist you in developing the faith, testimony and knowledge that you need to be great and powerful missionaries.

Fathers and mothers—recognise the great role that you play in helping your children to prepare to be full-time servants of the Lord. Your faith, your testimony, and your service set a powerful example to your children.

Priesthood and auxiliary leaders—starting with Primary and working through Young Men, Young Women and Sunday School years—recognise that your classes are in a very real sense mission preparation classes.

Ward councils and stake councils—make greater use of returning missionaries to assist you in preparing future missionaries. They are the most effective teachers of *Preach My Gospel* mission preparation classes. They also make wonderful home and visiting teaching companions for preparing missionaries and they understand and are ready to participate in every aspect of the work of salvation.

What a blessing it is to be led by a true prophet of the Lord. I hope that we will fully respond to his call and help many more of our rising generation to receive the blessing of missionary service. ■

NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Davids and the Goliaths,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 82–83.
2. Thomas S. Monson, “As We Meet Together Again,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 5–6.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “Welcome to Conference,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 4, 5.

LOCAL PAGES

Mini-Mission Touches Hearts

By Gary Larson and Anita Koia

Ronald and Anita Koia, the Mildura District Young Men and Young Women presidents, wondered how they could possibly encourage the youth in the district to prepare for missions. No missionaries had served from the district for almost 10 years. This led to some discussions, and a desire to have a mini-mission for the youth was envisioned.

Immediately, there arose a problem. As there were no sister missionaries serving in the district it seemed the activity would be limited to just young men. Adelaide Mission president

Bradley Carter approved the concept of the mini-mission involving full-time missionaries currently serving in Mildura, though he agreed that including sister missionaries was not logistically possible. However, with the sudden influx of sister missionaries into the mission as a result of the missionary age being lowered, that obstacle was also removed in time for the young women to participate in the activity.

Sister Anita Koia said, “Our desire for the youth in the Mildura District to have a spiritual experience grew when

President Thomas S. Monson announced the lowering of the age for the youth to go on missions.”

Ronald Koia had been on three mini-missions before he served a full-time mission in the Australia Adelaide Mission. The Koais both knew that organising a mini-mission would be a perfect idea for the youth to gain that spiritual experience.

The individual branch presidents were excited about the program and interviewed their priests and Laurels, inviting them to participate. As the youth leaders visited each family, and contacted the families in Robinville by phone to explain the mini-mission program, the

parents were very excited for their youth to take part in the special program, as it was the first time it had been offered.

The mini-mission activity began with everyone meeting at the chapel at 6.00 am. It was not easy for some of the youth, but they had a great desire to make the most of this first-time experience.

After a 45-minute exercise routine, the leaders gathered all

mobile devices so that the experience would be realistic. Most youth gave them up willingly, though a few were reluctant to hand them in.

The young men and young women were then assigned their companionships. The four Laurels were divided into groups of two, and each group was assigned one of the sister missionaries for a threesome companionship. Each priest was

Youth and leaders participated in the Mildura mini-mission activity.

assigned to one of the six full-time missionary elders as his companion. They departed to the current full-time missionary apartments to participate in personal and companionship study, have breakfast, and prepare to return to the chapel for opening devotional at 10:00 am.

The devotionals were the highlight for many of the leaders as the Spirit truly testified of the Lord's great and marvellous



IMAGE COURTESY OF GARY LARSON AND USED WITH PERMISSION

work in the individual hearts of those who attended.

Elder Viserio, who was the zone leader, gave a very powerful training. The eagerness of the youth to listen, to learn, and to go out and work was reflected in their eyes.

Each of them was given a missionary badge, and as their names were called they came one by one to the front of the chapel, ready to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

During five hours of proselyting, the youth had a variety of experiences both positive and negative. It was a very typical missionary day and showed them just how hard yet rewarding missionary service can be. They then had an opportunity to have a meal in members' homes and share a spiritual thought.

The missionaries gathered once more for closing devotional. Each young man and young woman had the opportunity to share their missionary experiences, and spoke of the difficulty of dealing with rejection, as well as being able to share the gospel. It was spiritually uplifting, and they could not deny the Spirit testifying of the truth. The young missionaries

learned that God loves all of His children and He will prepare a way for his children to feel His great love.

On Sunday they entered the chapel with great pride to be representing their Saviour. During sacrament as the new missionaries sang the hymn "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go" with all their hearts, the members in the congregation could feel the love these young missionaries had for the gospel.

As the Church meetings came to an end, and the badges had to come off, none of the youth wanted to let go of their missionary companions when they hugged their good-byes. They were reluctant to have to remove their missionary name tags, and complete their missions.

This mini-mission experience was a testimony to the youth of how God loves His children. Through His Only Begotten Son, He has provided a way for us to return to live with Him. This activity provided an experience the young men and young women will never forget, and memories that will last a lifetime.

Months later the youth are still talking about their experiences on the mission. Those

who took part are all preparing to serve full-time missions. Their lives were permanently changed.

The youth continue to go out with the missionaries on a weekly basis. They are grateful to be part of this great programme as youth, leaders and missionaries as they continue to strengthen their testimonies in the Saviour Jesus Christ. ■

Prospective Elders' Missionary Camp and Sisters' Conference

By Roseanne Jones

Over 40 prospective missionaries attended a weekend "Prospective Elders' Missionary Camp" which was held at Waikari Marae in Tauranga earlier this year. Tauranga young men and young single adults were joined by others from the Rotorua and Kaikohe Stakes for the camp.

One young man, Bradley Proper, shared his camp experience at a youth fireside with the following:

"To start with, I didn't really want to go. When my dad told me the camp was going to start on Friday, and it was up to me to choose if I wanted to go, I decided right away that I wasn't going! I wanted to stay home and play on the computer, or just hang out with my family and friends . . . *but* in the end I chose to go to the camp.

“The first day was probably the most spiritual day for me. We learned about Jesus Christ and really looked into His life and what He did for us. Within three hours I had learned more about my Saviour than I have ever learned before! It was great to feel the Spirit so strong! We had that Spirit with us throughout the entire camp.

“On the second day we were put into the companionships we were to stay in for the whole camp. To show us what it is like to be on a real mission, we were not to leave their side at all.

“One thing I noticed throughout the camp, was that all of the boys became really good friends. When I first got there I only knew half of the boys, but by the end of camp I knew all their names.

“On the last day, everybody broke off into their companionships and went home teaching. My companion and I went to teach a family. We talked to them, and bore our testimonies.

“If I had not gone to the camp, I would have gained nothing. I would have just stayed home and wasted away a weekend.

“I am so grateful for those who put the camp together. It was the most spiritual experience, and probably one of the best experiences in my life! We need to strengthen our testimonies so when we serve full-time missions we will be more than ordinary missionaries!”

Alma Ormsby has been called to serve in the Arizona Tempe Mission, although at the time of the camp he admits his “testimony was very weak.”

“Prior to the missionary preparation camp, I truly wondered whether the Church was true. A brother paid me a visit and invited me to the camp, and I made the effort to come,” he said.

“As the camp went on, I made new acquaintances and we were able to bond together. During our activities I could feel a spirit of unity between us. It was as if there was something in the air, and everyone seemed to be close friends. I certainly felt like that. We had opportunities to visit less-active members and invite them to church.

“During this time I had an important question of mine answered. I wanted to know how we can recognise the Spirit. Someone shared Galatians 5:22–23: ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.’

“That scripture answered my question. After that, I was able to recognise the Spirit working at the camp, and in my life. I knew the feelings I was having were of the Spirit, which the brethren had fasted for . . . and I felt happy.

“My testimony was strengthened, I gained new friends and I learnt and revisited good doctrine. This camp gave me a well-needed boost in my mission preparation.”

Alma entered the Provo MTC on 31 December 2013.

Tauranga Stake president Francis Fitzpatrick said one of the measures of the success of the activity was seeing the change in those who had no desire to serve a mission at the beginning of the camp, who wanted to serve a mission by the end of the camp weekend.

“The boys and their leaders felt the spirit of missionary work while they were on the camp,” he said.

The success and excitement of the PM Camp spread to the young women, so a one-day missionary conference was held for prospective sister



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missionaries. With similar success in their desires to serve, young women and YSA sisters were also inspired by the Spirit and teachings, including the testimonies of returned sister missionaries from the stake. It was the first time such a conference was held for sisters.

Young woman Ashlee Keelan-Orr was one of the attendees. “All through the day we learnt about what it means to be a missionary, how to

be a good missionary, and techniques that would improve our faith in the Lord. To me it greatly strengthened my testimony of missionary work, made me more sensitive to the promptings and influences of the Spirit, and generally just made me happier to be a member of the gospel. The talks and lessons given were very inspiring, making me glad I have the opportunity to go on a mission. When I am old enough, I *will* go on a

***The Prospective
Missionary
Camp at Waikari
Marae, Tauranga.***



IMAGE COURTESY OF ROSEANNE JONES AND USED WITH PERMISSION

The Sisters' Prospective Missionary Conference held at the Tauranga stake centre.

mission, and I will apply the techniques that we learnt. I now know how to be a spiritual, helpful missionary. The Lord will lead the way, and I will go on His path.”

There have been 20 camps held throughout several stakes, which have been attended by about 400 prospective missionaries preparing to serve in the mission field.

The first camp was initiated in 2010 by then stake president Jay Seymour of Manurewa, who sought for a way to increase the numbers of missionaries serving from his stake. With consistent pre-camp and follow-up support from leaders and further camps, the number of serving missionaries in the stake eventually rose from nine to 21.

Flaxmere Stake president Rikki Te Kira said the

camps have helped greatly in the call to “hasten the work”. His stake has held four camps in four years, and with a collective effort from bishops and leaders, and the lowering of the mission age eligibility, he is confident that the stake goal of 20 missionaries serving concurrently will be achieved.

The flexible programme usually begins on a Friday evening, continues through the weekend with church attendance on Sunday, and concludes with a stake fireside on Sunday evening. The focus is on building spiritual strength, addressing obstacles that might prevent someone from serving, and developing commitment to serving a mission. Tutors are respective stake leaders and visiting presenters, including Selwyn Jones, Les Harris, Shane Wikaira, Lee Edmonds and Hawea Kingi. ■