

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA SEVENTY MESSAGE

Increasing Convert Baptisms

By Elder Paul Coward

I was baptised when I was eight, in Palmerston North. My mother, Shirley, was baptised just before me. We travelled three hours by car from Hawera. We were new converts and unbeknown to us, we were helping grow the Church. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) stated, “If there were no converts, the Church would shrivel and die on the vine” (“When the World Will Be Converted,” *Ensign*, Oct 1974, 4). Consequently, increasing the number of new converts is an integral part of the work of salvation. There are other parts too. The first of these is member missionary work, which involves increasing the number of convert baptisms. Although there is one purpose, each part must be strong, joined, and work in harmony with the next part. For example, we try not to think about convert baptisms without also focusing on the ordinance of the sacrament and those received in the temple. A missionary companionship doesn’t teach the first lesson, then ‘high-five’ each other, exclaiming, “Our work is done!” They teach the

first lesson while also planning to teach the second lesson and so on, focusing their entire efforts on helping people receive the full blessings of the restored gospel. Listed below are simple and practical principles that may assist in increasing the number of converts who remain:

1. **A sacred work requiring unity, effort and enthusiasm.** In all stakes, districts, and missions in the Pacific Area, it is our goal to achieve 15,000 new converts in 2014. President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) felt we could double the number of new converts with concerted effort and with greater enthusiasm. Are you witnessing this in your stake? In your personal efforts? One aspect in addressing ‘concerted effort’ and ‘greater enthusiasm’ is when members and missionaries work together in a partnering relationship. Missionaries may do much of the teaching, but members and missionaries can all participate in finding, inviting, friendshiping, and nurturing those gaining or



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regaining an interest in the truth. This is not an ineffectual, short-term effort or experience. Increasing the number of converts means just that—we must increase the number converted. “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5). This sacred work is about saving souls, requiring our best efforts, and involving the Holy Ghost. We must never use force, guilt, panic, or overbearance to “get the job done” just to achieve a goal. Missionaries and members are sensitive to how they

approach this work and encourage one another. Leaders inform the missionaries of the ward plan and all align their efforts to it.

2. **The Lord knows His people; we are to open our mouths.** A few years ago, my wife, Julie, met a lady at a gym in Melbourne. They talked as they walked together on adjacent treadmills. To insert the gospel into the conversation, Julie would ask, “How was your weekend?” hoping that the question would be reciprocated. When the time came for Julie to talk about her weekend activities, the richness of the gospel, including the blessings of church attendance experienced by her family, was shared. Numerous invitations were extended, and although this new friend attended various Church meetings, there seemed to be a reluctance to progress further. However, as I looked at this friendship developing, I could tell it was far deeper than merely getting another convert. As a consequence, and after three years of that lengthy association and two worn-out treadmills, Lyn finally embraced the gospel. Seven years later Lyn

remains strong in the faith and a builder of the kingdom. Others may accept the truth more readily. I recall a Chinese man knocking on the front door of the meetinghouse. He seemed flustered. When the door was unlocked, he told us he was moving back to China in two days’ time and wanted to be baptised right now! The missionaries seemed stunned and looked at me as if to say, “We’ve never had anyone come running up to us and ask to be baptised right now. Can we do this?” We found that he had been an investigator in another location and had attended church many times before. This man had been taught all the lessons and was keeping the commandments, but needed the first ordinances. He was interviewed, baptised and confirmed, and then returned to China, saying, “I’m now a happy man”.

3. **By small and simple ways.** Our son-in-law Steve showed us how easy it is to assist in this work. He married our third daughter and they live in Melbourne. They visited us in Auckland in early 2014, along with other family members. There were 19 staying

at our house. On their first Sunday here Steve asked his mother-in-law (Julie, my wife) if he could invite another two people to dinner that night—along with the 19 already there. What was he thinking? Didn’t he understand that as the son-in-law, he had limited rights and privileges—something akin to being on probation? While asking my wife, he added, “And I won’t eat anything so we’ll have enough for the visitors”. Julie immediately responded, “Of course we can have another two people for dinner.” When we arrived home, we were blessed to meet Jonathon and his son. They were being taught by the missionaries and had attended church for the first time that day. Steve had befriended him and invited him to “our” house for dinner. We had great gospel discussions and got to know Jonathon and his son. We shared with him what the gospel means to us and answered questions. Jonathon subsequently accepted the gospel. As for Steve, well, he is now off probation! One person, looking for opportunities and opening his mouth, was able to strengthen these

investigators, and our family. Looking back, it seemed so simple; there just needed to be focus and a willingness to reach out to rescue. When I was called as stake president in Sydney, one ward was consistently baptising new members at a rapid pace. Upon inquiry, the bishop advised that one of the major reasons for their success could be attributed to the ward leadership inviting investigators and new members to dinner every week. Again, this is such an easy thing to do, and highly effective.

4. **We can all participate.**

We may be able to trade off with the full-time missionaries. Some may prepare themselves and then serve as missionaries. Most who earn an income can donate to the ward missionary fund. We can invite someone to dinner or to an activity and even have a lesson taught by the missionaries in our home. Some may provide transport or friendship. Most of us can attend convert baptismal services, and all of us can learn what the ward mission plan is and be willing and excited

to participate and support in our own way in the salvation of souls. All can help improve the missionary-work culture of their stake by bringing a new spirit with more enthusiasm that will be contagious to others. All can pray for opportunities and share experiences. Countenances and smiles can radiate the joy of gospel blessings. All can sing the hymns of Zion with much more reverent zeal, evidencing the love and testimony for the Saviour. We can all live our religion with more openness and determination. Participating is not



IMAGE COURTESY OF ELDER PAUL COWARD

The AhFua family are reunited with Elder Paul Coward.

something else we 'have to do' but is a privilege inherent in our covenant-keeping responsibilities that we are 'blessed to do'. Like many things in life, missionary work may come naturally to a few, but to others it may seem like a big challenge. A powerful spirit attends those who even begin to show an interest and desire. Wait to see the hand of the Lord as you do so. As President Henry B. Eyring has taught, "God will put prepared people in the way of His prepared servants who want to share the gospel" ("Sharing the Gospel Heart to Heart," *Ensign*, Sept. 2012, 4).

5. **Not just numbers, but converts.** Leaders, members, and missionaries must also have a longer-term focus and purpose, rather than having a baptism just to achieve a goal. Whilst I was serving as mission president, zone leaders reported that the sister missionaries in their zone had found a large family and they were starting to teach them. Each week during the following months, zone leaders would report that this family had been taught the lessons many times, were friendly, had attended church, but wouldn't commit to being baptised. The

sisters had tried everything. Finally, out of frustration I told the zone leaders to inform the sister missionaries that I would personally come and perform the baptism of Mr. AhFua, if they would set a date for baptism. Three weeks later, to our great joy, members of the AhFua family were baptised and confirmed. About nine years later, I was assigned to preside at the Narre Warren stake conference in Melbourne. I inquired after the AhFua family, who long ago had meant so much to me and our missionaries. Below is a photo of their family. Needless to say, for them to experience deep spiritual conversion unto the Lord, to be sealed in the temple, to have children serve missions, and to remain strong members required much more than the one who performed the baptism ordinance; it required more than the teaching and perseverance of those valiant sister missionaries. It demanded attentive and loving leaders and missionaries, Church friends who were real, teachers who would teach by the Spirit. It required an assignment, and much nurturing. They had to experience

for themselves through study, prayer, service, ordinances, and keeping covenants the power of godliness in their lives. To greet and embrace them after all these years and to witness their faithfulness to the new and everlasting covenant brought an indescribable joy to my soul. Said President Hinckley: "It will do no good for you to baptise someone and have that individual fall away from the Church shortly thereafter. What have you accomplished? . . . The whole process counts for nothing. *Any investigator worthy of baptism becomes a convert worthy of saving*" ("Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 109).

Finally, as a capstone, President Thomas S. Monson has recently taught: "Now is the time for members and missionaries to come together, to work together, to labor in the Lord's vineyard to bring souls unto Him. He has prepared the means for us to share the gospel in a multitude of ways, and He will assist us in our labors if we will act in faith to fulfill His work" ("Welcome to Conference," *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 4). ■

Who Finds a True Friend, Finds Treasure

By Jana M. (age 14)

It says in the scriptures that a true friend will stick with you till the end, making your trials their trials and your happiness theirs.

I met my friend Katie-Rose, who was not a member of the Church, when we started our first day at Bairds Mainfreight Primary School.

One day I invited her to our ward Christmas activity. Katie-Rose attended and enjoyed herself. Ever since then, I've been inviting her to our Primary activities, family home evenings, church on Sunday, and all other programs.

Just over two years ago, Katie-Rose agreed to listen to the missionary discussions. I sat in all of her discussions to help her feel comfortable. When the missionaries invited her to be baptised, she accepted the invitation and that was the best moment I've ever experienced, when my best friend agreed to join the Church.

Katie-Rose said, "I felt really happy when Jana shared the gospel with me the first time. I didn't know anything about it until Jana explained it to me. I was filled with joy. . . . I now know what the gospel is about and understand it. I invited my family to a few activities. My brother Farrimond accepted an invitation to attend church and from there our parents became interested."

At that time I designed some drawings of Katie-Rose's white baptismal dress so my grandma could make it for her; it was part of my Personal Progress project for the value 'integrity'. Katie-Rose was baptised in October 2012, and she asked my

big brother Adam, who had just been ordained a priest, to baptise her.

Adam reflects, "I felt humbled and excited at the same time. Before I went into the water I felt a rush of energy, and when I came out of the water after baptising Katie-Rose and Moezna Ainnu, I felt calm and full of joy, as this is my first experience of fulfilling this part of my Duty to God."

Her family was there that day, and it was the best day for Katie-Rose, my family and me. Missionary work never ends for me. My dad, James McGregor, served in the Adelaide Australia Mission, and Mum, Aina Tapu-McGregor, served in the Melbourne Australia Mission. They have always loved missionary work and serving the Lord with all their heart. My parents have set up routines for my brother Adam and me to keep doing our missionary work.

After Katie-Rose's baptism we prayed that one day her family might join the Church also. After much prayer and fasting, the Ormsby family invited the missionaries into their home to teach them the gospel. On the 22nd February 2014 Katie-Rose's parents, two brothers and two sisters were baptised. My dad helped the missionaries with the baptisms that day. The Ormsby family are now preparing themselves to enter the temple, to be sealed as a family for time and all eternity. Missionary work really is a blessing.

Katie-Rose's father, Henry Ormsby, said, "I wanted to give my daughter my love and blessing for bringing the gospel and friends into our family. Being a member of the Church has helped me change my life. My wife and I got married before we, and the rest of our children, were baptised, and are now members of the Church."

Her mother, Daphne Ormsby, added, “We wanted to put any bad feelings in the past, and change our lives around.” And her brother Farrimond concluded, “I know that Katie was happy to see her family being baptised, and become members of the Church of Jesus Christ.”

I would love to bear my testimony that I know that this Church is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God who restored His true gospel

in this dispensation as well as translated the Book of Mormon. It is our duty as members to do missionary work for both the living and the dead. If we really care about our friends, they can have the opportunity to hear about the gospel. I know that the plan of salvation is true and all other things pertaining to this gospel are true, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

The Lord’s Plan

By Charann Miller

When the Rima family experienced a trial of their faith, they had no idea that the Lord had set in motion His plan for them.

Opura and Natasha Rima are the parents of 12 children.

Their family consists of Opura’s three sons and one daughter, and his wife Natasha’s four daughters

The Rima family was baptised in 2012.

and one son. Together they also have three daughters.

Today the Rima family shares a strong bond of love and unity. They enjoy spending time together and giving service to those in need, but just over six years ago, it was a different story.

In 2007 the Rima family suffered a tragedy. Natasha lost her 15-year-old twin daughters in a car accident. The family was in emotional turmoil, and there was division amongst them as

each family member found their own way to cope with the devastating loss. Natasha said, “There was always a feeling of uneasiness and tension in the home.”

It was during that time the Lord planted seeds that would heal and bring them closer together as a family.

The first seed was planted when Opura’s eldest son, William, was baptised in early 2012. William became acquainted with the gospel through his wife, Jacklyn, who was born and raised in the Church.



IMAGE COURTESY OF RIMA FAMILY AND USED WITH PERMISSION.

William became an instrumental part in his father's conversion.

The second seed was planted through Natasha's daughter Letisha.

At a particularly difficult time in Letisha's life she prayed to the Lord for guidance and to know her purpose. She pleaded for answers because she felt lost.

After she finished her prayer she immediately heard a knock at the door. With tears streaming down her face she was greeted by two missionaries on her doorstep.

Letisha knew the Lord had answered her prayers and sent the two missionaries to her. One of the missionaries told her that they felt like they needed to come to this house, which was the last house for the night. That gave Letisha confirmation that the elders were on the Lord's errand.

Before the missionaries left that night they asked if Letisha would be baptised, and without hesitation she said yes. She was baptised on June 2, 2012. She soon realised that she wanted her family to experience the same feelings of the Spirit, and so prayerfully turned to the Lord to help them.

Willing to support Letisha in her beginnings in the gospel, Opura opened his home to the missionaries. This allowed him to hear the gospel while Letisha received her discussions.

Despite Opura attending another faith at that time, he felt a difference when he attended church with Letisha. He felt peace and the spirit every time he was there.

Opura eventually invited the missionaries to teach their family. When invited to be baptised, Opura knew it was meant to be when he discovered his son William, who lived in Australia, had already set a date for them.

Following the earlier baptisms of William and Letisha, just four months later it was to be the Rima family's special day.

On the 6th of October 2012, eight members of the Rima family were baptised. William was proud to baptise six members of his family, while Natasha's brother Eugene Gilbert baptised two. Having been baptised together that day united them even further as a family.

Natasha had already been baptised a member of the Church when she was young. Despite her family entering the waters of baptism, she was not yet ready to come back to Church. It wasn't until the baptisms for her twin daughters whom she had lost were done that it brought a sense of closure to her. Natasha's daughters did the baptisms on behalf of their sisters. Natasha feels comfort knowing that because of the plan of salvation she will be reunited with her beloved daughters again.

Opura has baptised two of his daughter's friends since joining the Church. He and Natasha call them their "gospel children."

Letisha says, "Everyone can have these blessings; all they have to do is open their hearts".

Since becoming members of the Church, the Rima family is happy and whole. There is peace and love in their home. Their faith and testimonies continue to grow each day. Family and friends have noticed a positive change as they reflect the example that the Saviour has set for them. They take comfort in knowing that because of the plan of salvation, even despite the loss of loved ones, their family can be together forever.

The Rima family's next goal is to seal their family in the temple for time and all eternity. Letisha is currently preparing to serve a mission. ■

A Word of Wisdom: “The Snake Will Bite You”

Imagine being confronted by a poisonous snake, coiled, ready to strike. What would you do? Go closer? Gamble on touching it without getting hurt? Sounds silly, but that is exactly the case each time you venture near pornographic images.

Through the Internet, the Lord has provided a wonderful tool, to share the gospel with the world. As media devices become more advanced, we need to be more careful that they don't eventually take over our lives, dictating what we see and hear.

You know you are getting closer to the snake when your first priority becomes media use over prayer, scripture study, or making healthy choices. Former Relief Society general president Julie B. Beck warned about the dangers of excessive media use; when we become misaligned to God we lose power and true perspective on what is really important in life. Our priorities become out of control. (Mormon Channel interview, 2011.)

There is help.

- Try a media fast, where you abstain from media use for a specific period of time such as 24 hours, at dinner time, family time or having conversations with family and friends.
- Turn your devices off at night to avoid distracting light or sounds.
- Put it away out of your reach; don't sleep with it near to you.
- Talk to your bishop, or a trusted friend. Unchecked, it can become an addiction.

Tad R. Callister, Sunday School general president, said, “No one can claim to be fooled by the effects

of pornography, believing there is any such thing as an innocent glance. It is a poisonous, venomous, unforgiving snake that will strike the moment you take your first look and will continue to strike with a full portion of venom with each look thereafter” (“The Lord's Standard of Morality,” *Ensign*, March 2014, 47). ■

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Stories should be approximately 350–500 words.

Please include the following information:

- The name of the person who wrote the article
- A high-resolution photo if available
- The name of the photographer and permission to use the photo
- A caption for the photo, including full names of people in the photo and their permission to have the photo published ■

