

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA SEVENTY MESSAGE

Increasing Sacrament Meeting Attendance

By Elder Robert J. Dudfield

Attending sacrament meeting each week provides us with the opportunity to reflect on covenants we have made as we partake of the sacred emblems and, in doing so, become renewed. The ordinance of the sacrament makes this the most sacred and important meeting in the Church. Elder Dallin H. Oaks remarked, “When we consciously and sincerely renew our baptismal covenants as we partake of the sacrament, we renew our qualification for the promise ‘that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with us’ (D&C 20:77).”¹ This is why one of the area goals focusses on increasing the numbers of members attending this sacred meeting.

With this promise in mind, the question arises on how we increase our sacrament meeting attendance. Increases occur in four different ways.

- Family sizes increasing through new births
- New member move-ins
- Convert baptisms
- Reactivation efforts

First: Family sizes increasing through new births

The doctrine of the family was made clear to Adam and Eve when they were commanded to go forth and multiply. The doctrine of the family is just as important for us today.

Elder Neil L. Andersen stated, “When to have a child and how many children to have are private decisions to be made between a husband and wife and the Lord. These are sacred decisions—decisions that should be made with sincere prayer and acted on with great faith.”²

Raising children in the gospel, with regular sacrament meeting attendance, provides opportunities for them to learn about the Saviour and His love for each of us.

Second: New member move-ins

On a recent stake conference assignment I had in Brisbane, Australia, a member approached me, mistaking me for the stake president. He informed me that he and his family were



Elder Robert J. Dudfield

relocating from overseas and had identified the area we were meeting at as the general area that he would like to relocate his family. He then said something that really resonated with me. “Our family consists of YSA, youth and Primary children. Which of your units could we be of most service to? This will help us with determining where to live”. You could sense that this family understood that as they put the Lord first, blessings would follow.

Third: Convert baptisms

In the 2013 mission presidents’ seminar, President Monson

stated: “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.”³ The explosion of social media now provides opportunities as never before to share the gospel in a non-threatening way.

President Hinckley declared, “The full-time missionaries may do the actual teaching, but the member, wherever possible, will back up that teaching with the offering of his home to carry on this missionary service⁴”.

At times I have caught myself praying that the missionaries will find people to teach. As I reflected on that statement I have realised that first and foremost it is my responsibility to find people for the missionaries to teach. As we pray for finding opportunities, the challenge is to be sensitive to the impressions of the Spirit so that we can identify when such opportunities occur and then act, rather than letting the chance pass by, wondering what happened. As Elder Pearson reminded us in

the Area Presidency broadcast in February 2014, “There are three kinds of people; those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what’s happening.”⁵ The Lord provides opportunities for us to make things happen!

After all, missionaries have been set apart to teach the gospel, having been authorised by a prophet of God. When we work together as members and missionaries in this sacred work, responding to the call from a living prophet, we see miracles appear before our very eyes!

Fourth: Reactivation efforts

Many reactivation efforts are occurring throughout the Pacific Area as members and missionaries work together reaching out to rescue. There are countless stories of members being reactivated after being away from church for many years, but as they are returning to fellowship with the Saints, they are bringing other nonmember family members and friends back with them!

In a rescue visit I was personally involved in, the bishop, a full-time missionary, and I visited the home of a less-active sister. The appointment had

been made a week prior to our visit, and it became evident when we arrived at their home that the Spirit had been preparing them. The nonmember husband greeted us at the door, and before we had a chance to say anything he stated that he knew why we were there. A little surprised by his comment, we enquired about what he thought the purpose of the visit was. “You are going to invite me to be baptised,” he quickly explained. Before we had a chance to respond, he further explained, “As I have been preparing for your visit, I have felt impressed that now is the time for me to be baptised!” Imagine our surprise at this unexpected welcome.

It was a wonderful visit with this family. Inspired invitations were offered in the spirit of love, and challenges were accepted. His wife returned to church, and he and his three children were baptised. The last time I saw this family was when I witnessed the most magnificent sight of husband and wife kneeling around the holy altar at the temple with their three children dressed in white, sealed as an eternal family. What a glorious sight, all because a prompting was received,

appointments for the visit were made, and an inspired invitation extended. When we focus our efforts and priorities on the Saviour, motivated by love, miracles occur. Who needs an ordinance? Here was one family who were blessed through the ordinances of the gospel and, in doing so, allowed the power of God to be manifest in their lives.

President Hinckley declared: “We thank the Lord, whose cause this is, for the marvelous growth now being experienced. The strengthening faith of the people is evident in increased

sacrament meeting attendance, in temple attendance, . . . which becomes an expression of their love for the Lord and of his generous blessings.”⁶

The Lord is hastening His work, and increasing our sacrament meeting attendance is evidence of united efforts in hastening the work of salvation together. As He hastens His work, may each of us hasten our work also. As we continue to increase the number of members attending sacrament meetings throughout the Pacific, may each sacrament meeting be a

spiritual experience strengthening faith and testimony⁷ as we focus on the Saviour and His glorious gospel. ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Always Have His Spirit,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 59.
2. Neil L. Andersen, “Children,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 28.
3. Thomas S. Monson, “Faith in the Work of Salvation,” available online at hasteningthework.lds.org.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 105.
5. Kevin W. Pearson, “Deepening Personal Conversion” (address given at Pacific Area Presidency broadcast, Feb. 2014), pacific.lds.org/area-presidency/broadcasts/2014.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “He Slumbers Not, nor Sleeps,” *Ensign*, May 1983, 6.
7. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 18.2.2.

LOCAL PAGES

Learning from the Saints in Papua New Guinea

By Elder and Sister Nom

As soon as we stepped onto Papua New Guinea soil in May 2013, we felt the Spirit of God, and have a firm testimony that faith precedes the miracles that He performs. We have seen miracles happen!

The first Sunday, we were taken to the Saivara Branch, which is on the outskirts of Port Moresby. We instantly bonded with our new Church family. It has been one of the most humbling experiences of our mission. The chapel has no walls, no carpets on the wooden floors, no cushioned pews, no power, and there is no car park, because the

members do not own cars. They walk for hours to get to church in the heat and the dust in the hot season, and in the rain and mud during the wet season. No one complains.

We loved attending this branch regularly, not knowing that the Lord had a plan for us to fulfill.

In October 2013, the Nine Mile District was combined, and the Gerehu District was formed. The Saivara Branch was reorganised and became the Eight Mile Branch.

Most members who were called to leadership positions were not widely known by the



Eight Mile Branch members achieve 100 percent retention of new converts by fellowshipping with them and sharing personal missionary experiences.

priesthood authority leaders who called them. They were called by inspiration from God. For the branch president (President Thomas Aji), it was his first calling; the 1st counsellor (Brother Keith Ramo) was a recently returned missionary, home for only four months; and for the 2nd counsellor (Brother Nashville Wararu), it was also his first-ever calling.

Although our mission is to digitise the births, deaths, and marriage records from the PNG Archives, we were truly blessed when our mission president called us to positions of leadership in the branch to teach them leadership skills. The first Sunday after they were called, and not yet set apart, their desire to “hasten the work” of the Lord was evident. When we arrived

at the chapel, the Young Men, Young Women, and Primary had already started their lessons under the trees sitting on wooden benches, which are their classrooms, because there are none in the chapel.

We have witnessed the miracle of faith, humility, and love. President Aji has shown humble leadership by his example. If he has enough money he will catch a bus with his family to come to church. If he cannot afford his bus fare, he will walk for one and a half hours to get to the chapel for his first interview at 8.30am, and his family will arrive later on the bus. The attendance has trebled since the formation of the branch.

A widow’s roof on her makeshift shelter was not sufficient to keep out the rain during the wet

season. Her home is on top of a mountain with no trees for shelter. She is a humble widow with children and grandchildren, and has met much hardship. She never complains. When the Relief Society president became aware of the situation, it was brought to the attention of the branch presidency. The elders quorum was assigned to go and see what needed to be done to make her shelter more habitable, and to get a quote for how much it would cost to fix it. The budget was arranged, and it was discussed in the branch presidency meeting. President Aji asked when the timber and iron would be available, and on being told that it would be ready by Thursday, his humble reply was, "Then we will do it on Friday. This is the wet season. I am taking time off work, so you need to as well."

On the chosen day, even though it was raining, the priesthood brethren climbed the mountain with the materials needed to fix her house. That is the faith and testimony of the branch president.

On rainy days it is humbling to see families arrive with only umbrellas to protect them from the rain. Their renewed testimonies have brought them to worship their Heavenly Father, rain, hail, or sunshine. When it rains, each auxiliary finds a space in the chapel to hold their classes. It is not uncommon to hear different hymns sung to another tune during opening and closing exercises.

Goals have been set for families to go to the Suva Fiji Temple to be sealed, as well as a returned missionary who plans to have a temple marriage to his chosen eternal companion, who is also a returned missionary.

Elder Nom said, "There is a memory that I will always treasure. That is the sight of the returned missionaries who served from the years 2000

to 2008. These are brethren who have become less active, married with children, and have now come back to church within the last few months. Our sacrament meeting is the last meeting. After sacrament meeting these 12 returned missionaries would put the chairs in a circle and sit there with recent converts and investigators and just talk about their mission experiences. This has helped us have 100 percent retention of our converts within that time." Members who have been less active for years are returning to activity. The Lord is hastening His work, and He has performed miracles. ■

Samoan Sisters Share Love of Family History on Television

Pago Pago, American Samoa

Tagi Schwenke and Afiona Faumuina wanted to share their excitement and knowledge about family history work with everyone in American Samoa. Now they have a weekly television program with which to do it.

"Liliu le Loto" (Turn the Hearts) is the title of the half-hour show, which airs Tuesday evenings on KVZK. It has become so popular that the station runs repeats on Monday evenings.

Each week it features local people who discuss and share their family stories and

genealogies. Since Samoans are usually quite familiar with their ancestors, the results are often new connections between formerly distant parts of the family.

Afiona Faumuina shared her family history on one of the first programs. When she did, Tua Nasserri Seve saw a name he recognized. Immediately after the program he excitedly called the station and talked with Afiona.

She explained, "My grandfather is the older brother to his grandfather, and now we're sharing additional information with each other."

Sinaiese (Sina) Peleti, a Catholic from Tafuna, was motivated by one of the programs. She called in and said, “I want to find out about my grandmother”. She arranged to visit the Pago Pago Samoa West Stake Family History Center the following Saturday afternoon to research her family.

She sits at a computer monitor with Apelu Opelu, one of the family history center’s consultants, and together they navigate an online family history site. She smiles enthusiastically when her parents are located. They

continue looking for her maternal grandmother, and even bigger smiles indicate success.

The cozy family history center not only has computers with Internet access to online family history sites, but also has microfiche and microfilm machines that can read scores of vital public records relevant to American Samoa. The center has its own copies of Samoan-related records so that patrons can access the information immediately.

Taito Navualaba is a Fijian who works in the fishing

industry in American Samoa. He is not a member of the Church and could claim Catholicism from his mother, or Methodism from his father.

He and the family history center consultants are intrigued that “Taito” is a Samoan chiefly name. They are curious as to whether he may have some Samoan ancestors. The center has sent a request to Salt Lake City for a microfilm of Fijian genealogical records that may help him in his search.

Tagi Schwenke and Afiona Faumuina are sisters and are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Afiona is the family history director for the Church in the Pago Pago Samoa West Stake, while Tagi works in public affairs in the same stake.

They both believe that family history is for everyone, no matter what their religious faith. “We have got to get this out there!” one said to the other as they talked about all the powerful tools available through the Church at the center and online. Then they thought, “What about a television program?” The rest is family history.

Afiona and her fellow family history workers are doing even

Sina Peleti (seated, center) came to the Pago Pago Samoa West Stake Family History Center to find her grandmother because of what she saw on the television program “Liliu le Loto.”



IMAGE COURTESY OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS LIBRARY



Afiona Faumuina (L) and Tagi Schwenke (R) are sisters who share a love of family history. Here they stand in front of a poster of their family tree at one of the many family history firesides being held in American Samoa.

more to make records accessible to everyone. They have created a database of names, dates and information extracted from the microfilm and microfiche records related to American Samoa and Samoa. Still a work in progress, it is now possible to do a computer search of nearly 200,000 names, dates and events from these records. More names and events are being added each week.

On a Saturday evening, the Leone Third Ward held a Primary and youth musical fireside titled “Ia vala’aulia Aiga

e o mai Fa’atasi ia Keriso!” (Call Families to Come unto Christ). Performances included solos, mother-child duets, a Primary choir, and a youth choir.

The outdoor foyer of the meetinghouse was decorated with scores of family history charts, photos, and pedigree charts created by children, youth, and adults. Tagi and Afiona happily stood in front of their family’s poster, ready to share their excitement with others.

When people read the names on family pedigrees and posters at events like these,

new and unexpected connections are often made. That night, a senior missionary from the US looked at Bishop Leiataua’s poster and said, “Elder Uati Leiataua was my missionary companion in Samoa 43 years ago.” The bishop responded with a big smile, “He is my younger brother!”

Connecting and learning about our families is an important tenet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is also a hobby shared by millions of people worldwide. ■

A WORD OF WISDOM

Prayer Builds Emotional and Spiritual Self-Reliance

Prayer is good not only for the soul but also for our psychological well-being, according to a growing body of social science research. The most effective type of prayer involves honest and open conversation with Heavenly Father (ie. colloquial prayer) and allows room to ponder

(ie. contemplative prayer). President Monson explained that action should also accompany prayer, quoting the saying, “Pray as though everything depended upon God. Work as though everything depended upon you” (“Come unto Him in Prayer and Faith,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2009, 8).

Healthy self-reliance requires us to do all that is within our power to meet our needs, and then to learn how to access additional resources to make up the difference. We all need support and guidance from others, including the support of family, friends, home or visiting teachers, Relief Society or quorum leaders, not to mention the many other resources within our community ranging from medical to educational services. Above all we need a relationship with our Father in Heaven and the Saviour, upon whom we are utterly dependent. Prayer is a tool to help us develop emotional and spiritual self-reliance by accessing power beyond our own, and by receiving guidance about what actions we need to take.

We live in a world which encourages immediate gratification. Sometimes we want immediate answers or solutions to life’s

problems. President Packer warned Church leaders to be careful not to merely “dole out” solutions or answers to inquiring members (see “Solving Emotional Problems in the Lord’s Own Way,” *Ensign*, May 1978, 92). Doing this might deprive individuals of the struggle

they may experience on their knees seeking answers and guidance from their Heavenly Father. This very process of prayerful struggle develops spiritual strength, teaches us how to receive revelation, deepens our relationship with Deity, and elicits peace and comfort. ■

Submissions for the *Ensign* Insert Pages and Country Web Pages

If you have any faith-promoting or testimony-strengthening stories we can use in the magazine inserts, or on the local Church website, please email them to: ensign-nz@ldschurch.org

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 ■

