

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Prophets, Seers, and Revelators

By Elder S. Gifford Nielsen

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Elder S. Gifford
Nielsen

What a blessing it is to live during a time when the Lord's prophets, seers and revelators shed light throughout a darkening world. In just a few weeks we have an opportunity in general conference to once again learn from inspired men and women more about God's great plan of happiness and how to deal more effectively with the issues of our day.

As we listen to the plain and simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can deepen our understanding and apply extra meaning to our own lives as we diligently search, ponder and pray about each message. I had a wonderful experience with this concept during the Saturday morning session of the 2010 October general conference.

President Thomas S. Monson gave his customary welcome, mentioned the building of five new temples and then threw out a zinger that caught my attention: "Now, before we hear from our speakers this morning, may I mention a matter close to my heart and which deserves our serious attention. I speak of missionary work" ("As We Meet Together Again," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 5).

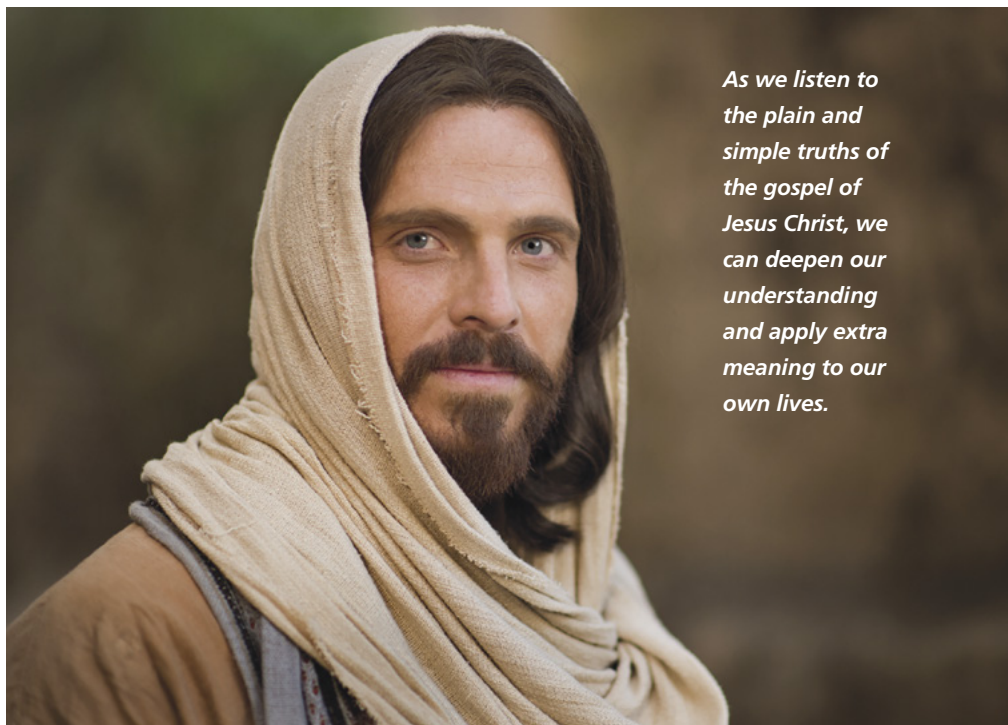
I was intrigued by this particular wording. No doubt missionary work had been on his mind. I found myself wondering exactly why the subject was so personal and so serious to him.

The Apostle Paul taught that we "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

"In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple

in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:20–21).

My greatest desire at that moment was to be linked with President Monson, "fitly framed together." I felt that understanding what was in his heart regarding missionary work would make me a better man. I began a quest to find the answer and I knew just where to begin. The Savior taught, "Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh,



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receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (3 Nephi 27:29).

About three months into the process, Sister Nielsen and I were invited by a stake president to attend a training meeting for bishops and their wives at his home.

During the training our host started speaking about how he was helping the young men in his stake prepare to be missionaries. He told us that he printed a list of every young man in his stake, retired to his bedroom, knelt and prayed for each one of the 207 young men by name! He pleaded with the Lord to help each of these sons to serve a mission and to reach his spiritual potential.

As I listened to this poignant story, the Lord chose to bless me with the long-awaited answer to my question. With great clarity and power it came into my mind that the reason President Monson had felt that missionary work was “close to my heart and [deserving] serious attention” was because that somewhere in the world Heavenly Father had 207 pure daughters preparing themselves for temple marriage and that the 207 young men the good president had prayed for so fervently needed to be honourable, clean, diligent returned missionaries to take them to a temple to be sealed for time and all eternity and together build 207 eternal families.

Brothers and sisters, our daughters, granddaughters and all of the young women we know and love dream about kneeling across the altar, looking into the eyes of a worthy priesthood holder and being sealed for time and all eternity. They have prayed for that blessing and the Lord has heard those prayers. That is serious spiritual business!

The Spirit had clearly spoken and rewarded me with an answer. About one year to the date of that message I was in a training meeting with President Monson when he taught that every young man needs to serve a mission in preparation to take a worthy young woman to the temple to create an eternal family. It was confirmed!

How grateful I am for apostles and prophets on the earth today to show us the way back home.

I promise that the Lord will bless us abundantly as we pay close attention to the words of our apostles and prophets during general conference and then sincerely seek to understand what the messages meant specifically for us. May we listen with ears to hear and hearts to understand, and may the Holy Ghost witness to each of us the truth and meaning of each message is my prayer for all of us in the Pacific Area. ■

LOCAL NEWS

New Zealand Latter-day Saint Artist Strives for Perfection

By Paula Fugal

New Zealander Dave Sotogi is driven by a desire to seek, achieve and share perfection everywhere—including in his roles as husband, father, artist, and volunteer Church leader.

On Sundays and in his spare time, Mr Sotogi leads his ward in Auckland’s northwest. When he’s not spending time with his family or at church, he works as an artist.

His artwork, he says, is “inspired by God’s creations and the unique beauty inherent in all things.”

“The beautiful scenery that we have in this country was part of the

“I love what we have in this country. We have flowers and fauna and native birds and trees that are only found here, and a lot of times we take that for granted.”



New Zealand artist Dave Sotogi uses his God-given talent to see people and nature in perfection.

“First and foremost I believe what I have is a God-given talent.”

Even though Mr. Sotogi’s art inspires and is appreciated by people around the world, he is still quick to acknowledge the source of his special gift.

“First and foremost I believe what I have is a God-given talent,” he says. “I show my gratitude to Heavenly Father for that talent by always trying to improve and become better and better and always do the absolute best that I can do. Every time I’ve finished a painting and I think I’m pretty chuffed with myself, all I have to do is look at a flower or tree and I have to remind myself that I’m not there yet.”

He believes being grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ has helped him define himself as an artist. “My faith won’t lead me down a path that is inappropriate,” he says.

Sotogi began his career as a graphic artist but changed his focus from graphic art to fine art when a family member encouraged him to try oil painting. It wasn’t long after his first attempt that he sold his first painting—he’s been painting ever since. ■

Creator’s plan,” Mr Sotogi says. “I love what we have in this country. We have flowers and fauna and native birds and trees that are only found here, and a lot of times we take that for granted.”

Dave Sotogi is known as Bishop Sotogi to his Latter-day Saint ward.

Debbi Beckstead, a member of his ward, says, “He is a man of great faith, and what he sees in the world is what he paints—but he paints it as he would see it in perfection.

He paints trees in full bloom. He paints Heavenly Father’s creations in perfection. You don’t see weeds, you only see beauty in his paintings. That’s what he sees in the people he paints.

“Bishop Sotogi not only inspires people through his artwork; he inspires them by the way he lives his life. He sees beauty and that’s how he sees people and that’s how he treats people. He sees them as Heavenly Father sees them.”

Latter-day Saint Young Men Participate in Interfaith Activity

By Carol Wallace

Charlton Martin and Matt Krull, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, participated with other young people in an interfaith activity in Auckland in June.

The Otara-Papatoetoe Local Board organised a service project to clean up and remove rubbish from a small part of the Otara Lake



Matt Krull (far right) stands with other interfaith participants in a photo taken by Charlton Martin.

and waterways. Participants removed mattresses, TVs, paint containers and other items.

The group consisted of 30 young adults from a number of different faith communities.

A tour of different religious sites took place following the service project. The tour included a Catholic church, a Hindu temple, a Buddhist temple, a Muslim mosque, a Sikh temple and a meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The group was greeted at the Latter-day Saints' Redoubt Road, Manukau, meetinghouse by Church leader President Mark Green. Charlton and Matt conducted the tour.

"The day was an opportunity to serve and meet new friends," said Charlton. "It is interesting how a little mud and hard work can bring you closer together. I think all of us found the values we share are stronger than our differences. At the conclusion of the event, a lake was cleaner, friendships were created and a greater interfaith understanding accomplished." ■

Tamaki Latter-day Saint Women "Quilt for Charity"

Latter-day Saint women from the Tamaki community united in an act of love recently to make quilts for those in need during the cold winter months.

The project, under the direction of Faleiva Tofa, was entitled "Quilt for Charity." The idea came from a quote by Latter-day Saint leader Henry B. Eyring: "The Lord's way to help those in temporal need requires people who out of love have consecrated themselves and what they have to God and to His work" ("Opportunities to Do Good," *Ensign*, May 2011, 22).

The women say they were also inspired by recent events, such as the earthquake in Nepal and Cyclone Pam.

"Life can be hard," Faleiva says. "And when you're feeling down, your problems can seem insurmountable. Volunteering to help others whose circumstances seem worse than yours can help you see your life from a different perspective."

A total of 130 quilts were completed and donated to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

IMAGE COURTESY OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS LIBRARY

Red Cross representative Amanda Aye tearfully responded after receiving the quilts, “We appreciate and love all of you for the beautiful handmade quilts. The people affected by the earthquake and cyclone are going to love these quilts—they are awesome!”

One of the project coordinators, Raewyn Butler, said, “Thank you to all of you, who out of love for others made these beautiful handmade quilts to help those families suffering from the cold this winter.”

Canned food items were also collected and donated with the blankets. ■



Tamaki sisters involved in the “Quilt for Charity” project

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Christchurch Latter-day Saint Women Donate “Blankets of Love”

By Paula Fugal

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One of the blankets donated to the community

Women from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Christchurch recently completed a three-month service project donating their time and talents to create

homemade quilts they are calling “Blankets of Love” to those in need in their Christchurch communities.

The women, all members of the Christchurch Stake Relief Society, met

together over a three-month period to design and craft blankets of many colours, fabrics and styles.

The 36 quilts were delivered to people identified as sick or in residential/respite care in their community. A custom-designed patch with the words “Christchurch Stake Relief Society, Blanket of Love” was sewn onto each quilt as a message to those who are experiencing difficult times.

“This has been an amazing activity as a Relief Society to serve those within our local area,” Suz Pitama, president of the stake Relief Society, said. “It has brought multiple congregations together with a common goal of service to our fellow beings living in our community.”

Following the distribution of the blankets, a special devotional was held where hymns were sung and those attending were reminded by their leaders of God’s love for each of them. ■

Mormon Helping Hands Service Project Part of Annual Young Adult “CTR Weekend” Conference

By Mormon Newsroom

Groups of young adults from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hit the streets of Hamilton recently in partnership with the

Grandview Corps Salvation Army to collect donations for Hamilton food banks.

The Mormon Helping Hands service project was part of the annual

young adult “CTR (Choose the Right) Weekend” conference held in Hamilton.

Each year the conference attracts hundreds of young Latter-day Saints



Young single adults perform service for the Salvation Army during recent CTR conference.



from around New Zealand and overseas and gives them the opportunity to engage in recreational activities, dance, workshops and worship.

The young people were divided into small groups and assigned streets to door knock across the city of Hamilton. “We were going around, knocking on doors and people were really willing,” said volunteer Courtnee Brosnahan.

The food collected from the drive will be distributed from the Norton and London Street Salvation Army food banks in Hamilton.

The Mormon Helping Hands program was established in 1998, and since then hundreds of thousands of volunteers have donated millions of hours of service to their communities. ■



Elder Kevin W. Pearson addresses youth regarding religious education.

Elder Kevin W. Pearson Urges Youth to Embark on “Quest for Education and Learning”

Auckland, New Zealand—

Speaking recently at the New Zealand Auckland Harbour Stake conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder Kevin W. Pearson told teenagers to “be active in secular and religious education.”

Elder Pearson counselled the young people:

“Everybody wants to follow what’s ‘trending,’ what others are ‘following’ or ‘liking.’ Everybody wants to fit in.

“It’s time to stop fitting in and start standing up and standing out.”

Elder Pearson also talked with the young people about the opportunity they have to learn who they are, in

particular their divine heritage as a son or daughter of God.

“As you learn who you really are, your divine identity will influence your beliefs and values, which will inform your attitudes and behaviours, which will lead you to act in certain ways,” he said. “This is how you shape your reality and your destiny. It all begins by learning your divine identity from your Father in Heaven by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

“Happiness is a decision, not your circumstances,” he said. “Ask, seek and knock, as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ invited us all to do. Ask your Father in Heaven for the revelation you need to know who you

are and what He wants you to do and be.”

Elder Pearson urged the youth to work hard in their religious and school studies. “You get what you focus on consistently,” he said. “Hard work reveals capacity. Your decisions about education and learning will determine your destiny.”

He continued: “We need educated leaders. Great leaders are great learners. It’s time to become a great learner.”

Elder Pearson spoke to around 200 teenagers at this meeting for youth as part of the two-day semi-annual conference for members and guests of the Church living in the northern suburbs of Auckland. ■