

# AFRICA WEST AREA LIAHONA LOCAL PAGES

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

### Christmas

By Elder Terence M. Vinson

First Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency



Elder Vinson

As we approach that favorite time of the year for many, I have reflected on the joy I feel at Christmas and the reasons for those feelings.

Christmas, for me, is full of wonderful memories of a time of the year which is different and special. In my childhood and teenage years, Christmas Day was not only a time of extra special consideration for the Savior, but also a time of happiness when extended family and friends would gather at our home to join with our family. Our home was the central gathering point because our family patriarch, my grandfather, lived there. I think of several of those family members who have passed away, including my father, my grandparents, most of my uncles and aunts, and some of my cousins. I loved these family members and still do. I feel a great tie to them and responsibility for them because of what I know and can give them.

Christmas Day would begin early and finish late, with lots of laughter and happy conversations, and games in the yard at the back of our house. There would be plenty to eat and drink, and all the cousins would be there, at least for part of the day.

The underlying reason for this celebration would always be remembered, especially at the start of the day. But the memories really consisted of two things—memories of celebrating the Savior’s birth, and memories of family. Both are critically important to both me and the Lord.

When I ponder more deeply, I see the connection between these two aspects. The birth of Jesus Christ was, in some ways, an announcement to the world of the importance of families. Rather than have Him descend

from the heavens with His deserved glory, Heavenly Father chose for Him to be born in the same way as any baby, and to most humble parents in Mary and Joseph, highlighting the fulfillment of one of God’s primary purposes—to form families which could become eternal. He indicated that bringing to pass the eternal life of man (implying eternal increase) was an essential element of His “work” and His “glory” (Moses 1:39). This focus on families was also evident in the first instruction He gave to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Moses 2:28).

Therefore, Christmas teaches us the centrality of the family in our remembrance of the Savior’s birth. What implications does that have for how we celebrate Christmas and how we show that we remember Him always, as we covenant to do each time we partake of the sacrament?

It seems to me that our focus should also be on forming families. We stress the importance of receiving the sealing ordinance as husband and wife in the temple when we teach our youth and young single adults. But they will form just one link in their family chain that can stretch for what seems to be a limitless extent.



*The birth of Jesus Christ was, in some ways, an announcement to the world of the importance of families.*

**If the Savior's work was about enabling eternal families, should our work not be the same?**

Those who have joined the Church in West Africa are the focal point for all their ancestors. We who have the gospel also have access to the ordinances that can save our ancestors and their loved ones. Many of them struggled through life to enable their children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to have more opportunities than they did. And we do have more opportunities, including one particularly that they may not have foreseen but which is now more precious to them than any other. The great opportunity is the fulness of the gospel with its accompanying ordinances of salvation. These ancestors look to us to perform those ordinances on their behalf, just as they did so much for us in other ways while they lived. They look to us to show real love to them, just as they know the Savior did for them.

We know that their spirits live, and we know that these spirits yearn to be united with their loved ones and to dwell with God. We hold the power to enable them to do that. "The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally"



***Let us . . . make this 2015 Christmas period and beyond a time when we rededicate ourselves to our families.***

("The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129).

**Should Christmas, then, not focus us clearly on our family relationships? Should our objective not be to bring salvation to our own families?**

We recently, in September, had the privilege of spending several hours with the Asante king at his palace in Kumasi. He is a noble and caring man, one who is concerned for the welfare of his people. That was clear from our conversation. He wants to help his people to have greater opportunities, especially through education and the preservation of their history and family linkages. Although he does not have the gospel (we did present him with both a personally embossed copy of the Book of Mormon and a large heirloom copy, together with a copy of "The Family: A Proclamation to the World"), he has this innate and burning desire to care for his Asante "family."

The Asante king's desire for his subjects is a reflection of the Lord's

desire for His children and a reflection of the eternal doctrines and principles we know to be true. Let us, then, make this 2015 Christmas period and beyond a time when we rededicate ourselves to our families—those here with us in body, and those not far distant but in spirit form for a time. The road for us was built by them, and we now travel it to our great blessing but with a significant responsibility. We are, in many instances, the only ones of our family who have the gospel and the ability to bring the ordinances to those who have gone before. Those ordinances will set them free and provide them with the greatest joy. Our names will be honored for what we have done for so many of our family members. They will call us blessed and saviors on Mount Zion.

But even more importantly, we will be showing our love to our Savior, whose birth we celebrate, and whose Atonement has brought us salvation.

As an Area Presidency, we wish you a most wonderful Christmas, full of memories and love, including our love for you. The Savior has taught us how to love through the great gift He has given us, and we can show Him our love by following His example and giving the gift of salvation to others, including to those of our family whom we have loved but whose spirits and bodies have been separated for a time. ■

## OUR HERITAGE

## Mission Interrupted by the “Freeze”

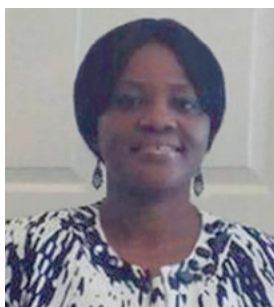
Taken from an article by Alice Johnson Haney

My father, Billy Johnson, known to many as the first leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana, was a very simple soul with an unusual grace. He was a very prayerful man. Prayer was his source of strength, and fasting was his spiritual weapon. He strictly followed the commandments and tried to serve others. His enthusiastic devotion to God and to the restored gospel kindled my eagerness and ardent interest to also serve God. Hence, I applied to serve a mission.

After graduating from high school, I was called to serve a full-time mission in my own country. I was excited but at the same time full of emotion.

One of the unique things about my mission was that none of the missionaries at the missionary training center (MTC) had attended the temple before beginning their missions. We all served a mission without the temple endowment, just as the early pioneers did. Nevertheless, we were to become instruments in the hand of God.

I served under President Gilbert Petramelo and his wife, Gretchen. My first assigned area was Koforidua, in the eastern region of Ghana, the most “fertile” field I experienced during my mission. My senior companion, Doe Kaku, later a member of the Cape Coast



Alice  
Johnson  
Haney

Ghana Stake Relief Society presidency, and I were the first sister missionaries to ever serve in this area. I was blessed with a companion who was spiritually inclined, and we connected so well in following the promptings of the Spirit.

With constant prayers and fasting, we were very successful in tracting, teaching the gospel, and committing our investigators to baptism. We did suffer our fair share of persecutions, but our successes outweighed our persecutions. We were blessed with multiple baptisms almost every month, but not all our discussions resulted in baptismal commitment. There was one occasion when we had the chance to meet Elder Pace, who was visiting Ghana. He was surprised at the high number of people in our teaching pool. The Lord was with us.

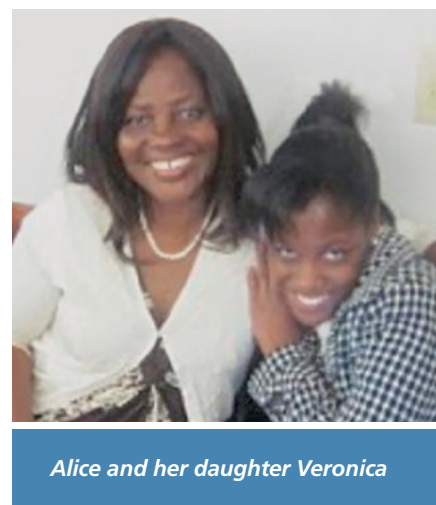
One of my most humble moments occurred when a senior couple, Elder and Sister Reeves, was assigned to serve in the same branch with us.

The Reeves’ past bishop in England, Bishop Danso, was a native of Ghana, and when this bishop died, his remains were sent to Ghana to be buried in his hometown, near Koforidua.

The Reeves were asked to lay a wreath on his grave on behalf of the members in England. This act of kindness opened a marvelous work. In the company of the branch president of Koforidua, Richard K. Ahadjie, we traveled to Akim Mase for the funeral.

Because the late bishop was from the royal family, we needed to obtain permission to visit the royal cemetery. In the Akim Mase palace, we met with the chief and his elders. The Reeves informed them of the purpose of our visit and also their desire to share the gospel. We were permitted to visit the cemetery to lay the wreath and then we were paraded through the town with the help of the king’s men. We introduced the gospel to the community leaders after a week, and it was a sight to behold.

Our first discussion took place at the palace. Most of our investigators were the schoolteachers of the town; most of them eventually accepted the gospel and committed to baptism. Our first baptisms were of 30 converts, followed by 27 and then 21 souls. Most of these converts became the first leaders of the group there. The death of Bishop Danso and the thoughtfulness of the members of the ward indirectly saved dozens of wonderful people in a distant village.



In April 1989 my parents were called to serve a full-time mission. They were assigned to the same area where I was serving. In fact, we were serving in the same ward and I lived only about two miles (3 km) away from them.

A few weeks into their mission and my ninth month on my mission, June 14, 1989, the government of Ghana banned the Church's activities. I was proselyting with my companion, Hetty Brimah, when the news was broadcast to the public, but we were not aware of it. We soon realized that a lot of people were staring at us (more than usual), and my companion commented, "Why is everybody looking at us?" I ignorantly responded, "Because we just came out of the hair salon and we look beautiful."

Immediately when we reached home, our landlord, the late Patriarch D. K. Boateng, told us that we needed to report to the mission home. My dad

told us the sad news and advised us to gather our personal belongings and report to the mission home in Accra. He was very calm when he told us the news and there was a period of silence. He later became very defiant and exclaimed, "This is the work of the devil, and we must fight him with prayers and fasting." When we reached the mission home the next morning, the yard was packed with missionaries; a sight I will never forget in my lifetime. There was not a single dry eye.

On July 12, 1989, all the missionaries serving in Ghana were honorably released to go home until further notice. My parents were the only missionaries serving in disguise; they continued their full-time mission without wearing their name tags. Their mission was to strengthen the members during this period—to get them to hold on to their faith and wait for the reopening of the Church.

Returning home suddenly from my mission after just 10 months was a very confusing moment in my life. I felt like I was losing everything of significance in my life. I couldn't go back to school immediately due to the time of the year, and I could not find work. Most of the returned missionaries faced the same challenge. I was very desirous to complete my mission as I had vowed to my Father in Heaven, but since I wasn't sure when the ban would be lifted, I decided to find temporary employment while I waited. Within a few months, I was offered a job as a marketing and sales associate by Benjamin Abbey, a marketing manager who was one of the returned missionaries.

I decided to prepare for my future life as well, so I enrolled in an evening remedial class to further my education. I was successful and gained admission to attend Holy Child Teachers Training College.

In September 1990, before the first semester ended, the government lifted the 18-month freeze on the Church effective November 1990. I felt obligated to return to complete my mission, so when I returned home for the Christmas holidays, I did not go back to school. I put my education on hold to complete my first priority in life, to serve God.

I returned to complete my mission in early February 1991 under the presidency of Grant Gunnell and his wife. Being in the mission field for the second time, I fully understood why my spirit was so eager to complete my obligation to God. After the freeze there was no MTC in Ghana for about six months, so all the previously serving missionaries just picked up their scriptures and went off to the mission home and then to the field without any problems. But problems soon started erupting when the new missionaries arrived without any training. I suddenly became the new female missionaries' trainer as well as assisting those who needed special encouragement to stay focused. I was very successful on both of my missions because I tried as much as I could to be in tune with the Spirit. I submitted to the Lord's will and learned to listen as the Spirit directed. I was finally released from my mission on March 12, 1992.

In January 1997, I was blessed to attend Brigham Young University–Hawaii under the work-study program.

Due to life changes, I moved to New Jersey to complete my bachelor of science in computer engineering technology and my master's of science in information systems. I met and married my husband, Vernon O. Haney, and we have

been blessed with a precious gift—Veronica Haney.

The gospel has always been the very core of my life through numerous callings. Active participation in the Church has been my greatest source of strength and support. ■

#### MISSIONARY

## Missionaries Bring Joy with Christmas Carols

By **President Norman Hill**

Ghana Accra West Mission President

In Ghana—a nation of 25 million people designated as the most religious country in the world by a survey from the Pew Educational Trust in Philadelphia—the holiday tradition of Christmas caroling was imported by Latter-day Saint missionaries and carried into the New Year.

“While Ghanaians enjoy music, no one has gone house to house before singing Christmas carols until now,” said Daniel Abeo, stake president for the Accra Tesano Stake. “It is surprising to people here. It is so unusual to see anyone going around singing on street corners, in housing compounds, or on city streets. People stop and listen. Sometimes they join in. Sometimes they want to have their photos taken with the missionaries.

Often they want to know more about this gospel.”

A year ago the Ghana Accra West Mission began caroling in market areas, near LDS Church buildings, and in parks. “People loved it,” said Joseph Ikoro, who has since returned home to Nigeria from his mission in Ghana, and is sharing the experience with members and friends there. “At first, local members did not know what we meant when we said ‘Let’s go Christmas caroling.’ So we told them it was singing hymns and songs of praise in small groups outdoors during the festive season. It did not take long for even members to join in. At the New Town Ward, we planned 10 different locations to go caroling over 10 different days with members and

missionaries. We all enjoyed it and were able to get a large number of investigators who were curious about what we were doing.”

Remembering last year’s success, the New Town Ward again planned Christmas caroling several times on a busy street near their building. “The New Town Ward is ideally situated to sing Christmas carols since it is at a cross section of several major pedestrian walkways. There are not a lot of



**Missionaries singing carols at the Mall**

entertainment options for many people in Accra, so singing carols is a fun way both for passersby and missionaries to meet each other,” said Elder Timothy Clark from Star, Idaho, USA.

In late November, a new shopping mall opened in a suburb on the west side of Accra, so Elder Roger Wickham from Chubbuck, Idaho, USA, and Elder Keitumetse Moroke from Phokeng, South Africa, decided to talk to the mall management about singing carols at the mall on Christmas Eve.

“At first, when Elder Wickham explained things to them, the management didn’t get it. But since I had never sung Christmas carols in my home country until I came on a mission, it somehow seemed easier for me to explain it. Since Elder Wickham played in the BYU orchestra before his mission, he gave us some additional credibility that we would not have had otherwise,” Elder Moroke said.

On Christmas Eve and again on New Year’s Day, the missionaries from the Odorkor Zone gathered together at the mall, not knowing exactly what to expect. The mall was filled with shoppers. They started at opposite ends of the mall and began singing as they walked toward the mall entrance. Some people followed them; others stopped and looked over the handrail from the upper floor. Families gathered around them as they arrived at the entrance.

“The look on people’s faces was amazing,” said Elder Henry Bwamble from Masaka, Uganda. “I was not on a mission last year and no one sings Christmas songs in public places like this back home so I was a little nervous about it all. I did not need to be worried. Sometimes people would stop and just admire what we were doing. At times, little children would come to hold our hands or just stand beside us. We all had kindhearted feelings that are hard to put into words, but we knew it was the Spirit of the Lord. In our mission, we have missionaries

from 24 different countries, so when a zone with 20 of us gets together, we are already an unusual sight.”

The missionaries did some things to appeal to the audience that gathered as well. “I brought a locally made drum to play when we sang ‘Little Drummer Boy;’” said Elder Kade Kichevar from Henderson, Nevada, USA. “There is a different beat that is used here and I seem to have picked it up rhythmically so it really shows that we understand the local culture. Then we close by singing ‘How Great Thou Art’ (*Hymns*, no. 86) in Twi, a local language spoken in this part of Ghana,” he said.

With the closing song in a local language sung together by white and African missionaries from countries outside Ghana, the spectators spontaneously broke into applause and rushed the missionaries, shaking their hands, congratulating them, and asking questions about what they were doing in Ghana. Some thought they were professional musicians hired by the mall. Others made appointments to find out more about the gospel message. All had a great time.

“When I get home we are going to start singing Christmas carols in my home country,” said Elder Shingirai Svinurai, from Yellow City, Zimbabwe. “With missionaries from so many different places in Africa who are learning Christmas carols here while on a mission, this could start a whole new tradition in many, many different places.” ■

## RELIEF SOCIETY

## Church Aids the Elderly

### Lagos—

Leaders of the Relief Society in the Lagos Nigeria West Stake, in partnership with the Institute of Social Work of Nigeria (ISOWN), visited the Centre for Happy Elderly People (CHEP) on April 3, 2015.

Items such as a water dispenser, bags of rice, clothes, kitchen equipment, toiletries, scriptures, and other supplies were donated during the visit.

The centre, which has eight staff members and 10 elderly residents,

has been providing health care and other welfare services for the aged since 2008.

Centre coordinator, Lilian A. Jiringho, expressed appreciation for the visit and encouraged people to be more involved in advocacy for elderly people because they have the right to live and receive care. She further stated that it is not just the responsibility of social workers to care for the aged, but also every individual because as people get involved in this

important mission, they are working for God.

Kemi Otun, the National Executive Secretary of ISOWN, while addressing her fellow social workers and care providers at the centre, encouraged them to keep up their humanitarian service with prayers for God's guidance, protection, and rewards for their diligence.

Atere Olawale, the chairman of ISOWN, also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve as a social worker and promised that the institute would get fully involved in advocacy for the aged. ■



*At the presentation*



**PRIMARY**

# My Christmas

Christmas is a very happy time for me. We play and have fun. Christmas makes people come together and be happy. We remember the birth of Jesus Christ and go to church to thank Him for that day. I want to tell the world that Christmas is a time for doing good and showing love with no disagreements.

In Ghana there is no snow, but in some other countries there is a lot of snow. Even though the climate is different, we all remember our Savior's birth and try to be like Him.

I like the December theme for Primary from Doctrine and Covenants 76:22: "And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!"

I know that my Redeemer lives.

*Jarom O., age 9  
Kpone Ward, Ashaiman Ghana Stake*

Christmas is a special time because we believe that the Savior was born at this time. For others, it's another holiday from work and school to party and have fun. Like many families, mine travels to my father's village on Christmas Eve. I always look forward to such occasions because I get to see my extended family and play with my cousins.

I love Christmas because my parents buy my siblings and I new clothes for church, but best of all, I love Christmas because it reminds me of Jesus Christ, His earthly parents, and our Heavenly father.

*Pascaline A., age 10  
Achimota Ward, Adenta Ghana Stake*

Christmas is the day our Savior Jesus Christ was born. His father, Joseph, was a carpenter, and his mother, Mary, was a virgin. Jesus was born in a stable.

When the shepherds heard of the Savior's birth, they became happy and went to inform other people of the news. I like the shepherds in the Christmas story because I want to be a missionary to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now we celebrate Christmas by going to church and giving thanks to God for sending His Son to earth. Christmas brings friends and families together. It also brings reunion among families. I am happy each time it is Christmas because my parents will buy me and my siblings new clothes. We also receive gifts from friends. We also travel to the village to visit my grandparents. Although there is no water closet there, I still love to go to the village because we always have a wonderful time together.

I love Christmas.

*Nyamekye Agyina S., age 11  
Adoagyire Branch, Tesano Ghana Stake*

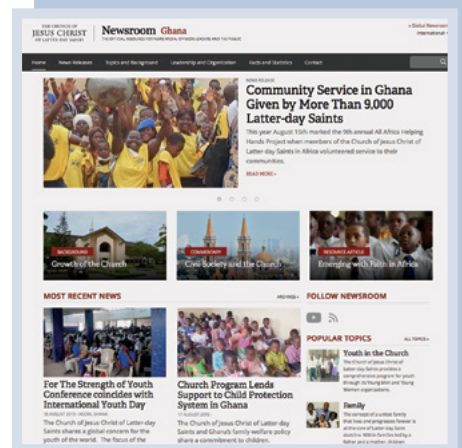
Christmas is the day Jesus Christ was born and Christians celebrate our Savior's birth. The Wise Men who came to see Jesus brought Him some gifts. Because of this, I know that Christmas is about sharing. We can share our food, clothing, and whatever we have with those who are poor. I love Christmas because it reminds me of our Savior's love. ■

*Dil A., age 7  
Achimota Ward, Adenta Ghana Stake*

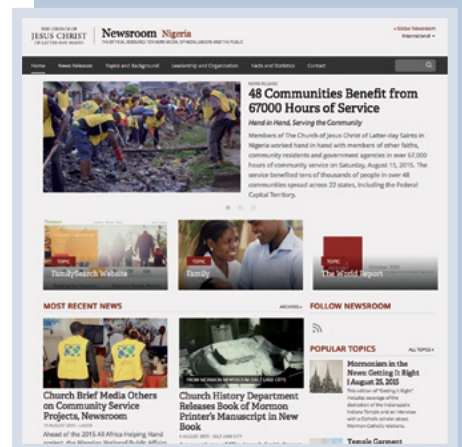
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