

ASIA AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Ward Council and Sacrament Meeting

By **Elder Robert K. William**
Of the Seventy

The Lord in His infinite mercy for His children has always provided various ways to assist in leading them to exaltation and eternal life. One such help has come in the form of councils. In speaking to Enoch the Lord says, “Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also” (Moses 7:35; emphasis added?). The Lord set the pattern for councils when He invited all His children to the great and the Grand Council in Heaven (see Abraham 4:26). We all were part of that council and chose to keep our first estate. Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is governed by this god-given gift of council. The Church is organized in councils from the First Presidency to the ward, quorum, auxiliary, and family. These councils are fundamental to the order of the Church.¹

President Stephen L. Richards (1879–1959), First Counselor in the First Presidency, said, “The genius of our Church government is government through councils. I have had enough experience to know the value of councils. Hardly a day passes but that I see . . . God’s wisdom, in

creating councils . . . to govern his Kingdom. . . . I have no hesitancy in giving you the assurance, if you will confer in council as you are expected to do, God will give you solutions to the problems that confront you.”²

The ward council functions on the principles of love, unity, and respect to all members of the council. They recognize that they not only represent their organization but also, as council members, help leadership address concerns and find solutions in the ward. The objective of the council is to help strengthen individuals and families.

The sisters in the council play a very important role, not only with their own auxiliary responsibility but also with their input to the other

organizations, as well as helping the bishop in finding solutions. Their input adds essential perspective in understanding and responding to members’ needs.³

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared this experience, “In a recent council meeting with the presidencies of the women’s auxiliaries, the sisters told me that very few women in the Church express any interest in wanting to hold the priesthood. But they do want to be heard and valued and want to make meaningful contributions to the stake or ward and its members that will serve the Lord and help accomplish the mission of the Church.



Elder
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“For example, not long ago we were talking about the worthiness of youth to serve missions. President Elaine Jack said, ‘You know, Elder Ballard, the sisters of the Church may have some good suggestions on how to better prepare the youth for missions if they were just asked. After all, you know, we *are* their mothers!’ The sisters’ suggestions can help equally regarding temple attendance and a host of other matters with which priesthood leaders may be struggling.

“Brethren, please be sure you are seeking the vital input of the sisters in your council meetings.”⁴

The other aspect of the council is to understand, support, and sustain the presiding leader. The council members are encouraged to speak up and honestly give their opinion and viewpoints. These may be different from others, and a wise leader will allow the Spirit to work through them until all the council members are unified; thereby the decisions of these councils are made according to the pattern the Lord has revealed. The Lord has said “The decisions of these quorums, or either of them, are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long-suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity” (D&C 107:30). After carefully considering the input and counsel from each leader, the presiding authority

may make a decision that may not be what was expressed. When such a situation happens, council members need to immediately support the decision of the leader in a spirit of unity and harmony.

Sacrament Meeting

The Savior introduced the sacrament during the Last Supper. Knowing that His final hour was near, He invited His Apostles to dine with Him one last time. He took that opportunity to bless and break the bread and said, “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). He took the cup, said a blessing of thanks, and passed it to those gathered saying “This cup is the new testament in my blood” . . . “which is shed . . . for the remission of sins” (Luke 22:20; Matthew 26:28). In this manner the Savior instituted the sacrament.

When the Savior visited the Nephites in the American continent, He instituted the sacrament there. He commanded His disciples to go and get some bread and wine. “And when the disciples had come with bread and wine, he took of the bread and brake and blessed it; and he gave unto the disciples and commanded that they should eat” (3 Nephi 18:3). He then commanded them that they should give it to the multitude. After the multitude ate, He looked at His disciples and said, “And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body,

which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7). Similarly, He commanded His disciples to take the cup of wine and drink of it and also give it to the multitude. He said, “Ye shall do it in remembrance of my blood, which I have shed for you, that ye may witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:11).

Sacrament meeting should be a spiritual experience for us. As we partake of the sacrament, we remember the body and blood of the Son. We witness unto God that we are willing to take upon ourselves the name of His Son and always remember Him. We are also committing to keep His commandments. Sacrament meeting should inspire us to remember Him and to keep His commandments so that we can always have His Spirit to be with us.

Leaders of the Church have asked us to better observe the Sabbath day at church and at home. Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy stated, “One aspect of the focus on better observing the Sabbath day at church is that bishops, who are responsible for planning sacrament meetings, are being asked to counsel with ward councils about

their proposed plans for future sacrament meetings.”⁵ This god-given gift of council is utilized to ensure that the most important meeting of our Sabbath day worship is affording all members the best opportunity to remember the Atonement of the Savior and to partake of the emblems of His body and blood. It provides us a time to reflect on our own lives and to make the desired changes. It allows the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood to exercise their priesthood as they prepare, bless, and pass the sacrament. Children sit quietly and reverently as taught by their parents. It is a time for us to listen to messages of inspiration and counsel. It is a time to ponder the doctrines that Christ has taught us.

May we counsel together to improve our Sabbath day observance. May we remember the sacred Atonement of the Savior as we partake of the bread and water. May we listen to the sacrament prayers and be willing to take upon ourselves the name of the Son, always remember Him, and keep His commandments. May we do so and always have His Spirit to be with us is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 4.1.
2. Stephen L Richards, in Conference Report, Oct. 1953, 86.
3. See *Handbook 2*, 4.6.1.
4. M. Russell Ballard, “Strength in Counsel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 76.
5. General Authority Training, Apr. 2015.

How Prayer Helped My Conversion

By Ravindra Kunchala

Prayer played an important role in my life. I bear my testimony because my sincere prayers were answered.

My name is Ravindra. One day after completing my college hours, I was waiting for the bus with my friend who is a member of the LDS Church. I met the elders through my friend. We made an appointment, and they started teaching me. They invited me to attend church on Sunday. At the time I was going to another church and believed that converting to another church was not good.

I didn’t attend church on the Sunday when the elders invited me. That day the elders called me, but I ignored them. I began ignoring many of their calls.

My parents are non-Christians, and even though I was going to church and studying the Bible, they didn’t say anything to me because they were very friendly and gave me considerable freedom. When I was young, I stayed with my aunt, and she taught me about Jesus Christ. I love my parents and I’m happy with my family. As my parents were non-Christians, I had a question



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*Elder Kunchala
with a family on
their baptismal day*

in my mind: “As Christians, we have the commandments of God. If we follow them, we will be saved and after this life we’ll live with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in heaven. Where do non-Christians go when they die?”

I asked this question to some of my friends and other members in my church. They answered that when non-Christians die they go straight to hell and won’t be saved. This answer depressed me because

it’s not my parent’s fault they were born as non-Christians. They are also children of God; why wouldn’t He save them? Why would God let them go to hell for no fault of theirs?

I used to have this question in my mind and I simply went to church with the question, but I couldn’t find any answer to it. I began losing faith in God.

The elders started calling me again and again to teach me the gospel. One

day I answered their call. They said they had a special message for me. By that time I had developed some interest to meet them. Before leaving my home, I prayed to Heavenly Father that I needed an answer to my question, but I didn’t have much faith that I would receive one.

I met the elders at the church and they started teaching me the plan of salvation. In that lesson my question was answered. I was surprised by

the lesson. The elders taught me that people who don't get the opportunity to hear the gospel will get the opportunity in the spirit world. That lesson completely changed my life; that answer made me very happy and filled my heart with joy. My faith in Heavenly Father increased.

Because of that lesson I trusted that this church was the true Church of Jesus Christ on earth. I started learning more from the elders and their teaching cleared my doubts. They set a baptism date for me and I started preparing for it.

I told my parents about my baptism, but they said no to it. They said, "Go to church regularly and read the Bible and the Book of Mormon, but don't get baptized." They gave me freedom, but they didn't allow me to be baptized. I knew the importance of baptism, and I also knew that baptism is like a key to the gate of heaven.

I told the elders about the situation I faced with my parents. They told me to pray about my baptism and that I would receive an answer from God. I started praying continuously about my baptism, and every day the elders asked me if I received an answer. Every day I prayed, but I didn't receive an answer, but I had faith that I would receive an answer from Heavenly Father.

One morning I prayed and while I was traveling on the bus, I pondered the things the missionaries had taught

me. I had some guilty feelings in my heart because I told my parents that I would not be baptized without their permission, but I had a strong desire to be baptized into the true Church. While I was thinking about baptism, suddenly a thought came into my mind that my parents are not Christians. Because they were born as non-Christians, they don't know Heavenly Father's plan for them. If they knew the plan, they would have a desire to partake of that fruit which Lehi saw in his vision (see 1 Nephi 8:15–16) and accept Alma's invitation to partake of the fruit of the tree of life (see Alma 5:62).

After understanding my Heavenly Father's plan for me, if I did not step forward, how could I help my family partake of the fruit which is very sweet? If I did not take the step forward, I would not be under the salvation of God and would not have the chance to help my parents receive salvation. I needed to be baptized to receive salvation and help my parents.

Because of this answer from God, I lost the feelings of guilt from my heart. It was gone in a second. The same evening I met the elders. They asked me if I received any answer to my prayers. I explained the thought that I had on the bus and told them I wanted to be baptized!

I am really grateful for my Heavenly Father. He helped me to understand His great plan for me and helped me

to know which way I should walk. He answered my sincere prayer.

I slowly started to apply the things that I learned from the elders about the gospel. My behavior changed slowly, day by day, and my mom recognized my good example at home and in society. She started to understand the teachings of the Church. She then gave me permission to be baptized.

I was baptized on October 7, 2012. I was happy when I was baptized and felt that I was under the salvation of God. I felt great joy. After my baptism I started reading the scriptures and spending more time with my family. I slowly started teaching them about Jesus Christ, and my mom showed much interest in listening to the gospel. I was surprised but very happy.

I know that one day I certainly will live with my family and my Heavenly Father. I know that one day I can help my family receive the salvation of God. I know that the priesthood has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. I know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord's kingdom once again established on the earth. I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. I know that Thomas S. Monson is a prophet, seer, revelator, and the mouthpiece of God.

I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Brother Ravindra now serves as a missionary in the India Bangalore Mission

Being a Missionary

By Elder George Anthony

The noblest aim is to strive to make other lives better and happier.”

Serving a mission was always a dream of my life ever since I joined the Church. Since that time, my desire to serve God kept growing. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gave me the privilege to bridge my desire to serve God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has changed my life and made me happier. I really thank the elders who taught me and helped me to be baptized in this true Church. I still remember the missionaries’ first visit to my house; they found my family through knocking on our door. They taught us the message of the Restoration and introduced us to the Book of Mormon. It was something new to me. Though I came from a Christian background, I was not ready to accept their message blindly, but the missionaries invited me and my family to read the book of Mormon and to pray and ask God if this book is true. Later that night I wanted to know for myself if it was true because I had a good feeling when the missionaries were teaching my family. As I prayed, I received an answer through a warm feeling that it is true.

The Book of Mormon played an important role in my life. This is the

very book that kept me active in the gospel and made my life change day by day. Initially it was hard to understand as a new member, but later, as I kept reading daily, I was able to understand and apply the doctrine into my life. The application part of the Book of Mormon had increased my desire to serve a mission.

When I was preparing to serve a mission, I faced a lot of challenges. When I graduated from college, I wanted to go on a mission, but due to my family situation, I couldn’t. I continued to do my master’s degree and I completed it. Then I looked for a job to support my family and to repay my educational loan. I found a good job in a good company. Meanwhile, my brother received his call to serve in the New Delhi mission. I decided to help him to serve, so I stayed home and started to work and this made me to wait for almost seven years to serve. I learnt patience through this experience. I understood that God knows when I should serve him. After much prayer and much fasting, my parents permitted me to go on mission. All the challenges that I faced to go on mission made to me strong and prepared me well to serve the mission.

As a missionary I had great experiences to learn and to serve God’s children. I had an opportunity to serve in all the zones in the India Bangalore Mission. Mission life gave me the privilege to learn leadership qualities

necessary to become a better leader. God had a great plan for me in all the areas that I served in. I was very helpful in working with part-member families and inviting them to come unto Christ, helping them be complete as a family so that they all can be sealed with their family in the temple. I understood my purpose as a missionary was not just to baptize but also to help them make covenants in the temple with their families. As missionaries when we saw them going to temple, that brought great joy and happiness into our lives. I always remember the saying that a missionary is someone who sacrifices two years of time to bless other families for eternity. On my mission I understood that the house of the Lord and the blessings of the temple are priceless.

My next important vision in my life is to go to temple and be sealed with my family. On my mission I was able to know the great importance of family love and care; I want to see my family receive those blessings.

I truly testify that “the noblest aim in life is to strive to make other lives better and happier” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: David O. McKay* [2003], 179). I remember the words of Christ in the book of Matthew: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). We can see the



Elder Anthony



principle of sacrifice in this verse; missionary service is what we need to do to follow this doctrine.

As a missionary I not only blessed others' lives but I was also able to change myself and align myself to God. Missionary service makes each one of our lives different. For me especially it made me a better person in this life. It also taught me to be a better son to my parents and a better husband and father in the future. The

things that we learn in this sacred calling as a missionary remain for the rest of our lives, if we use and apply them into our lives.

I strongly believe that any blessings that will come into our lives is through obedience. As a missionary I learned this principle of obedience. I know that obedience is greater than sacrifice.

I know that God lives and he hears our prayers. He is always there

to comfort and help us. As we read the book of Mormon, it brings safety for our soul. I know and testify that prophets are called by God. I know that missionary work is a sacred calling given to all of us. As we embrace this gospel in our lives, we can be better people in this world. I testify these things are true in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

Elder Anthony serves in the India Bangalore Mission

My Mission and “in the World” Again

By Akash Amalaraj

I can still remember my plane ride coming back home. I was anxious, nervous, and very excited to see the faces that I love so much. It had been two years since I left home and I never imagined it all coming to a close this quickly. Painfully, the flight took more time than usual.

I landed, greeted by the nicer weather of Coimbatore than the extreme temperatures I'd seen for a while, and greeted by even sweeter hugs from family and friends. There were fewer friends at the airport compared to the time I left. I chuckled at the thought.

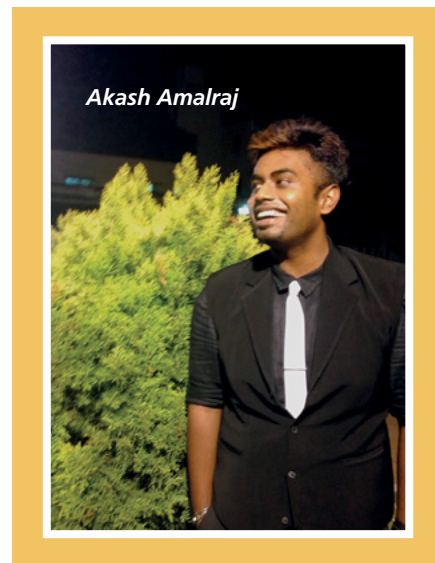
Riding back home, I remember that Dad drove. I was amused by the Tamil writings on the billboards and the language spoken by everyone. It seemed different. It all felt like a dream. Actually, the entire day seemed like that. I felt like I was hallucinating. I can't describe the feeling in words. We had dinner together as a family. I'd given my mom a list of what to make when I got home, and it was all there!

The next morning I woke up sobbing, just knowing it was over. My greatest journey, decision, and time was all done. All that I had now were memories. Memories of things I'd done, people I'd associated with, and places I'd been. Memories I'll cherish forever!

The days following my returning home were equally as difficult as my training days in Pitampura, Delhi. My mission president could tell you how I was during my training—I complained about almost everything. Meeting people was the best thing I did in the initial days of my homecoming. But they seemed different, or probably I was. Not being able to relate to people's conversations about the current affairs made me fade out many times.

I still remember one day in church, when everyone was busy with things to do, and I was just standing there doing nothing. I felt like going back to where I belonged to a group of busy people.

That feeling has been there many many times! Now as I almost finish two months of being back home, things seem a little better. I often wonder why I felt that way, or why I still do. I guess



what I can make of it now is that things at times don't seem clear when you look ahead. It takes a great deal of faith in the Lord and also in yourself to steer ahead. It seems better when you look back at the purpose of it happening.

I gave my best to my mission—I value it more than anything in the world. It meant the world to me! Now, during times of decision making, I can hear my own lessons ringing in my ears, prompting me to do what is right.

If there is anyone out there who feels like I did, it is alright. Just to let you know, the Lord loves you and has greater trust in you now in choosing the right! ■

Akash Amalaraj returned from his mission and now lives in Coimbatore, India.

LOCAL NEWS SUBMISSIONS

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