

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

A Prophet's Call to Action

By Elder Terence M. Vinson

First Counselor, Africa West Area Presidency



Elder Terence M.
Vinson

Usually when we talk of faith in a gospel reference, we mean faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice, because it is in Christ that our faith finds power. In order for faith to lead to salvation, it must be centered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And after that he came **men also were saved by faith in his name**; and by faith, they become the sons of God. And as surely as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, **it shall be done unto you**” (Moroni 7:26; emphasis added).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that we can exercise faith in Christ “unto life and salvation” only when we have three things:

1. An assurance that He exists,
2. A correct idea of His character, and
3. A knowledge that we are striving to live according to His will. (see Lecture 3 of *Lectures on Faith* by Joseph Smith)

Having faith in Jesus Christ means relying completely on Him—trusting in His infinite power, intelligence, and love. It includes believing His teachings and following His chosen prophet.

His prophets lead us according to the Savior's will. President Thomas S. Monson has always sought God's will and responded to God's call. Our prophet has now issued his own call, patterned on that given by the Savior Himself when He said to Peter, “Feed my sheep” (see John 21:16–17).

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke is entirely dedicated to three parables which all teach the same principle. That implies that this principle is of

great importance to the Lord. Those parables concern the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. In each case, someone or something of value is lost. The person responsible for that which is lost gives their complete attention to retrieving or rescuing what is lost, and a great celebration is held when that which was lost is found.

President Monson, in October 2015, challenged all the General Authorities of the world to practice and reteach this principle of “rescuing.” His message had been given to this group once before, in April 2009. I was present on both occasions and felt the overwhelming power of his message when it was first



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delivered, as did all others who were there. This was unmistakably a prophet's call to action, and his call is now repeated. It cannot be ignored!

He told the story of the "lost battalion" in World War I. This battalion was

a unit of the 77th Infantry Division. During an offensive on the front lines in France, a major led this battalion through a gap in the enemy lines, but the troops on the flanks were unable to advance and the entire battalion

was surrounded. Food and water were short, and casualties could not be evacuated. Repeated attacks were repulsed. Notes from the enemy requesting the battalion to surrender were ignored.

Newspapers heralded the battalion's tenacity. After a brief but desperate period of total isolation, other units of the 77th Division advanced and relieved the "lost battalion." Correspondents noted in their dispatches that the relieving forces seemed bent on a crusade of love to rescue their comrades in arms. Men volunteered more readily, fought more gallantly, and died more bravely.

We are also called upon to rescue a lost battalion—the lost battalion of those who have wandered from, or who have not yet received, the ordinances of the gospel. President Monson went on to quote another prophet, President John Taylor (1808–87): "If you do not magnify your callings, God will hold you responsible for those whom you might have saved had you done your duty" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (2001), 164). Our prophet continued: "Our task is not insurmountable. We have been called by the Lord; we are on His errand; we are entitled to His help."

You will remember the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who after he had been sold into Egypt and had risen to a position of great authority

CHURCH HISTORY COLUMN

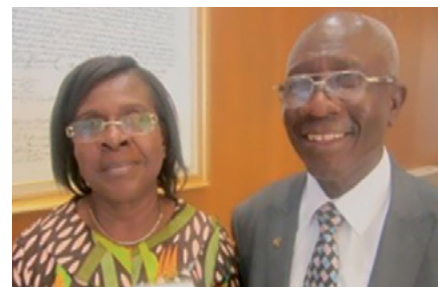
The Decentralized Model of Church History Work

By Charles and Mercy Sono-Koree


Area and Assistant Area Church History Advisers, Africa West Area

As The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints enlarged, it became necessary for Church history work to be decentralized to enable local leaders receive training from the Church History Department staff and replicate this effort in their local representatives. In 2009, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles met with the Church Historian and his staff and approved the decentralized model.

In a decentralized model, Area Presidencies provide leadership and resources, and the Church History Department provides support and training. This training is limited to the



Charles and Mercy Sono-Koree



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was visited by his brothers who did not recognize him. Joseph arranged for his brothers to travel to their father in Canaan but insisted on keeping their youngest brother, Benjamin, as surety for their return. Judah, one of the older brothers echoed their concern that the youngest might not return with them to Jacob. He volunteered to stay in Benjamin's place because he knew his father would be heartbroken if his youngest and beloved son, Benjamin, did not return with them. He pleaded with Joseph: "For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me?" (Genesis 44:34).

We will similarly face our Heavenly Father.

From the stage play *Shenandoah* comes the inspiring line, "If we don't try, then we don't do; and if we don't do, then why are we here?"

Brothers and sisters, we have been called by our prophet. He has

asked us to exercise our faith in the Atonement of our Savior by helping to rescue some of the Savior's lost sheep. By responding to his call, we satisfy the third requirement needed for our faith to be sufficient for our own salvation. We can gain a knowledge that we are "striving to live according to His will," meaning the will of Jesus Christ, the Great Rescuer.

I invite you to exercise your faith in power. Consider particularly those members of your ward or branch who have not been receiving the blessings of the sacrament. Will you ask our Heavenly Father, in prayer, who and how He wants you to rescue? And then respond by doing what He wants.

Let us volunteer more readily and fight more gallantly on our own crusade of love. Our reward is life eternal, or salvation, both for us and for those we rescue. Otherwise, "why are we here?" ■

Temple Worship

By Elder Frederick O. Akinbo

Area Seventy

One of the greatest blessings that we enjoy today is the opportunity to attend the temple in the Africa West Area. This blessing should not be taken lightly as



Elder Frederick O. Akinbo

commended by the Savior in Doctrine and Covenants 6:12 where we are admonished to “trifle not with sacred things.” The temple and the holy ordinances are indeed sacred, and we should be spiritually sensitive to them. The real blessings of the temple come as we enhance our temple experience by visiting the temple regularly. The prophet Haggai charged the Saints of old in Haggai 1:4: “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?” This charge is actually for our days as the children of God remain in the comfort zone of their homes while allowing His holy house to lie fallow.

We are most concerned about the hustling and bustling of this world. We are overwhelmed with what we wear, eat, and use—in fact, we are concerned with things that have no

area and assistant area Church history advisers, country and regional Church history advisers of an area. These advisers, on receiving such training, also train stake, district, and mission historians and their priesthood leaders for similar training to those in their respective units.

The Africa West Area consists of area and assistant area Church history advisers, and six country Church history advisers in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo/Benin, and Nigeria. Due to the size of Nigeria, it has four regional Church history advisers responsible for each coordinating council area (CCA).

Brother Charles Sono-Koree and Sister Mercy Sono-Koree are the area and assistant area Church history advisers for the Africa West Area, with Brother Kenneth Andam responsible for Ghana as the country Church history adviser; Sister Justine Oule, Ivory Coast; Brother Dargbe Sayon Doe, Liberia; Brother Sahr Allieu Sellu, Sierra Leone; Brother Charles Gbatti Gbandi, Togo/Benin; and Brother Sunday F. Oyedeji, Nigeria. Those responsible for the coordinating councils in Nigeria are Brothers Hope Anwuacha, Aba, CCA; Austin Akomah-Mordi, Benin City, CCA; Eshiet Okpok, Calabar, CCA; and Stephen C. Ejeilo, Enugu, CCA. (please)

The brothers and sisters currently serving are very committed to their

work and are serving with love and joy. The decentralized model is seen as a blessing to the Church because it has brought Church history work out of obscurity. Most members in the Africa West Area have now come to know about Church history work. Before the decentralized model, the area was recording below 6% submissions annually. From 2009, the area started making progress in its submissions and in 2013 recorded a 100% submission rate, which is a great achievement. The area is also striving to record more oral histories with its pioneers, leaders, and those with faith-promoting stories.

It is our prayer that all those who may be invited for an oral history will respond with love to open up to the inspiration. We are grateful to the Area Presidency for the support and resources provided. We thank all our advisers for the great work being done within the area and finally express our profound gratitude to the Lord for bringing the Africa West Area this far with Church history work.

I testify that God lives and that Jesus Christ is truly our Savior who came to atone for the sins of man that we may be privileged to be with our Heavenly Father as we strive to live righteously in this our mortal existence. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

eternal significance while neglecting the weightier matters (see Matthew 23:23). The prophet Haggai further stated: “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes” (Haggai 1:6). We worry about things that are for the Lord to fix for us. We mortgage our eternal happiness for things that have no eternal significance to us. We work all through the day and night, yet we never have sufficient for ourselves; we earn salaries from those labors of ours and still we remain in debt simply because we have placed the Lord last instead of first on our list of priorities. Haggai counsels us to “consider [our] ways” (Haggai 1:7).

In Revelation 7:15, the Apostle John helps us understand the frequency with which we should be in the temple for worship—“serve Him day and night in his temple”—and that we are promised that the Lord “shall dwell among [us].” I acknowledge that our circumstances may not permit us to be in the temple day and night, but regular temple worship might suffice.

The Apostle John further opens our eyes to the Lord’s special blessings as we worship frequently in the Lord’s holy house: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;



neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16–17). What a promise, brothers and sisters, to work little and earn so much; what a promise that we shall hunger no more neither thirst anymore; what a promise

that as we are faced with adversities, the Lord shall wipe away our tears.

Brothers and sisters, let us strive to worship Him day and night in His temples so we can earn those promises. I testify to you that the temple is truly a house of the Lord, that He resides in that holy house, and that He meets with us as we come to worship in His house. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

world. When I went to school, I told my friends, ‘Listen up! This is true!’ That approach didn’t go over very well. They resisted, got angry, and argued back. From that experience, Calvin says, “I learned that the better way is to set an example, avoid contention, bear testimony and let the Holy Ghost direct me.” Much later, when talking with one of his long-time friends, Calvin disclosed that he was a Mormon. The friend had never heard this and was very surprised. “He posed all sorts of questions about the Church and the temple. That was really when I started to feel like a missionary. By this time I knew better than to make him feel bad about his religion. I just answered his questions as best I could and shared my testimony. Though he wasn’t particularly convinced after the first discussion, he kept asking more questions and that kept me on my toes.”

“My parents gave us a lot of counsel,” Calvin says. “Sometimes it would get on my nerves, but I knew it was all for the better. I have learned that whenever they have counseled me to do something and I do it, I see the fruits of it, and it has been beneficial to me. But when I have gone against their counsel—trouble. I have had consequences from it. It’s like there are prophets in the house.”

While in school, Calvin accompanied the hymns in sacrament

MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Growing Up in the Gospel

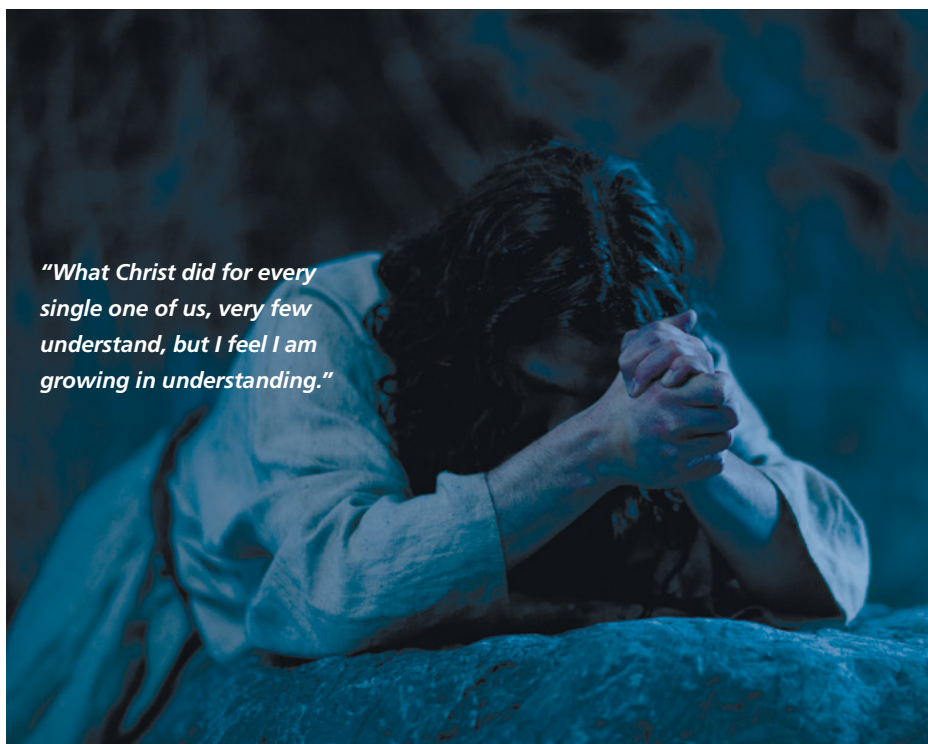
Adapted from an article by Sister Sandra Joan Smith (missionary)

Calvin Sowah, age 20, is serving a mission in London England. He is the second of three boys. Winfred, the oldest, served a mission in Nigeria. He was the first to fulfill a dream their mother has cherished ever since she heard a General Authority say that parents should prepare their sons to serve a mission. Reginald, 17, is still at home with his parents while he finishes high school.

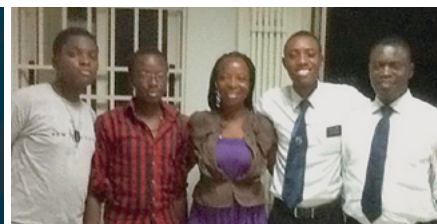
Their parents each joined the Church before they met and married. There is a family dedicated to preparing missionaries. Calvin recalls the schedule they kept in order to do this.

The family would wake up at 4:00 a.m. so that the boys could attend seminary at the bishop’s house at 5:00 a.m. Their family devotional, which focused on scripture study, was held at 4:45 before leaving for seminary. Seminary ended at 6:00 and by 6:30 the whole family left the house for school and work. When school was not in session, the family devotionals continued.

Calvin caught the missionary spirit his first year of high school. He was studying Joseph Smith’s history from the Pearl of Great Price and, says Calvin, “I got so enthused about it that I wanted to share it with the whole

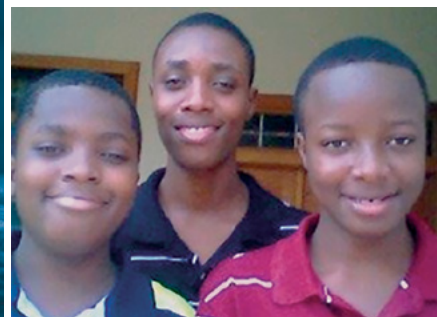


"What Christ did for every single one of us, very few understand, but I feel I am growing in understanding."



▲ *The Sowah Family*

*From left: Reginald, Winfred,
and Calvin*



and priesthood meetings, and did it skillfully. When they were younger, he and his older brother found a simple electric keyboard and a Church keyboard instruction manual in their home. At first they played with the instrument a bit but then started practicing it in earnest every night. Though they didn't have any lessons, they both got to the point of actually playing a song and performed for family home evening. Both boys have accompanied the singing at church on their missions. "We learned on our own, with God's help," Calvin says.

Before his mission Calvin served as the first assistant to the bishop in the priests quorum as well as the assistant ward choir director. Leaders and visitors to the Sunday morning Young Men class noticed that after class was over, Calvin would quietly shake all the other boys' hands and encourage them, giving them an extra warm welcome if they were new or facing challenges. "They are my brothers and friends," he said.

At one point in his schooling, Calvin wanted very badly to join a college preparatory club at the American Embassy, where outstanding students met to learn about future educational

opportunities and to prepare for college-level work. Applying for membership in this club required submission of one's high school transcript; on the basis of that and an interview, the applicant was either accepted into the club or declined. Calvin realized that although his grades were generally very good, his physical education grade was not, and it would likely keep him out of the club.

He talked with his mother, who, he says, "Is the kind of woman who wants her children to choose for themselves. She gives you the direction you need, but ultimately she wants the

choice to be yours.” Calvin thought about cheating. “I was feeling very, very bad. My mind kept going back to Primary, remembering my teachers telling us that cheating is wrong and asking myself many questions: ‘Are the teachings of the Church not true?’ ‘What if my children in the future ask me about how I got in that club? Will I tell them I cheated?’

“I just knew that if I let this thought continue, there was no way I was ever going to feel comfortable. ‘I just cannot do this,’ I thought. I would rather have my transcript just the way it was.

“I went home and told my mom. She was very proud of me, and I was very happy I made the right decision. I did get into the club, but I had already decided it would be all right if I didn’t. At times when we are tempted to do something that is wrong, we must stick with what we know to be true.”

Calvin’s testimony began to grow in junior high school, when he “went on a search” to learn if there is a God. He recalls thinking a lot about the matter and says that one day a great realization hit him. Whether he liked it or not, when he compared those who are living the gospel with those who are not, the sharp contrast was obvious. Those who live the gospel are prosperous and enjoying living, and those who do not “are in a region of darkness. I came to the conclusion that God lives.”

Asked to bear his testimony, he says, “What Christ did for every single one of us, very few understand, but I feel I am growing in understanding. He has promised us that if we will believe in and follow Him, He will prepare a place for us. And I know without a shadow of doubt that our leaders are called by a real God who sees us and knows us individually and is ever ready to help us. All we have to do is just succumb to His will and we will be fine.” ■

VISIT AREA WEBSITES!

Africa West Area Websites:

English: africawest.lds.org

French: afriquedelouest.lds.org

Mormon Newsroom Ghana:

www.mormonnewsroom.com.gh

Mormon Newsroom Nigeria:

www.mormonnewsroom.org.ng ■

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