

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

The First Vision

By Elder Vern P. Stanfill

Area Presidency

In the tops of the Rocky Mountains in Montana, the four seasons are very pronounced and have become an important part of my life. Spring in the Rocky Mountains is a particularly splendid time of year. The grass grows green and trees devoid of leaves during the winter once again take on their cloak of beautiful splendor. Mountain wildflowers whose beginnings have been hidden in the frozen ground also spring forth to bloom in a carpet of wonderful colors. Waterfalls cascade down tall peaks as the mountain snow begins to melt, bringing beauty and life to valleys below. Mountainsides previously brown and sterile become tapestries of remarkable color and life. Animals native to the area have their young in the spring so that they may be prepared for the oncoming winter, which is only a few months away. It is wonderful to see them play in the meadows and fields of a newly born landscape.

Western Africa is much different from the Rocky Mountains of Montana. However, the spring here also shows the promise of new life. As I have looked closely, beauty and

splendor have been restored in the spring here as well. The flamboyant trees are rich with orange blossoms. New growth on bougainvillea and other flowering plants is stunning against the clear blue sky. The red dust of the long Harmattan winter has been washed away by the life-giving rains of spring. Colors seem more vibrant and beautiful. It is like looking through a freshly cleaned window.

So many beautiful events in the history of man have occurred during this precious time of year: the birth of the Savior, His Resurrection, the

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marvelous First Vision, and the organization of the restored Church. I don't think it is coincidence that the Savior chose this time of year for these events to occur. They all represent beautiful beginnings and a restoration of spiritual life to all mankind.

When Joseph Smith walked from his home to the peaceful grove of trees through fresh green grass and new wildflowers, kneeling in the midst of a spring of new life, little did he realize that the restoration of spiritual life to the world was about to take place. The world had fallen into a spiritual winter devoid of correct thinking and spiritual progress. For centuries the life-giving light of the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity and completeness had vanished from the earth.

Each time I read Joseph's description of the events of that day, my spirit is renewed by strong spiritual feelings. As you might imagine, Joseph had the opportunity to recount these events in many different situations and to many different people. The accounts as we know them vary slightly but the truths taught by the vision are fundamental and are emphasized in Joseph's telling

of the experience. Perhaps I can describe some of the wonderful truths learned on this precious spring day.

It is helpful to quietly read Joseph's account of the First Vision:

"After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

"But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

"It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the



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enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" (Joseph Smith—History 1:15–17)

Joseph's vision teaches the world anew the true nature of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, for he saw

two Personages. God the Father and His Son appeared, resurrected and glorified. Restored understanding of ancient scripture once again taught: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Our potential as spiritual sons and daughters of a loving father becomes apparent because we are created in the Father's image. Being created in the image of God means more

LOCAL NEWS

The Obong of Calabar, His Eminence, Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi Otu V Graces Calabar Nigeria South Stake Conference

By Brother Edem Edem

Stake Director of Public Affairs

The Obong of Calabar, His Eminence, Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi Otu V, the Grand Patriarch, the Treaty King, and Natural Ruler of the Efik Kingdom graced the Calabar Nigeria South Stake Conference held on Sunday, May 22, 2016.

The Obong, represented by five traditional rulers—three Etuboms and two Otu-Ekong (Obong's warriors)—arrived at the University of Calabar International Conference Centre and listened to all the talks and concluding remarks by the presiding authority, Elder Frederick O. Akinbo of the Seventy.

The Etuboms were His Royal Highness Etubom Bassey Okor Bassey Duke (Chairman, Etubom Traditional Ruler's Council), His Royal Highness Etubom Ntiero E. O. Effiwat, and His

than a physical likeness—it also means having characteristics of the Father. The First Vision teaches us of divine capacities and spiritual potential not taught since the early Church established by the Savior.

The Father introduces His Beloved Son. This helps us understand the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is not difficult to see the love and trust that our Heavenly Father has for the Savior. Further latter-day revelation teaches of the Savior's roles as Creator of the earth, Jehovah, Savior and Redeemer of the world, and our Advocate with the Father.

We learn through Joseph's account about the adversary and his desire to prevent the gospel of Jesus Christ from being restored. The exaltation of all of God's children rested upon the restoration of the gospel, its doctrines and sacred ordinances. Perhaps most of us have felt the influence of the adversary in our own lives when we are on the verge of spiritual enlightenment. It is not unusual to hear a subtle promotion of feelings of inadequacy when we are presented with a new spiritual challenge, or the taunting of continued feelings of unworthiness and hopelessness after we have repented. While Joseph's experience was dramatic, it is not so different than our own experiences as the adversary attempts to

divert us away from a true course to our Heavenly Father.

When reading the account, it is easy to feel the love that our Heavenly Father and His Son have for all of us. In the midst of spiritual confusion, once again they provided a way, a path, a sure plan to return to Them. Their love for us is so complete and perfect that They will never leave us to our own insufficiencies but rather guide us carefully back to Them. It is difficult to imagine a Father more patient and kind or a Son more obedient and loving, as They strive with mankind to bring to pass our eternal life.

I believe that new life came to the world on this beautiful spring day in 1820. The spiritual landscape of the world changed. Beauty was restored to the earth never again to be taken. It was as though mankind could once again look through a newly, perfectly cleaned window into the eternities seeing with perfect clarity the true nature of our Heavenly Father and His perfect Son and Their plan for us.

I testify of the truthfulness of the First Vision. The Spirit has born witness to my soul of this truth. I bear testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He saw God the Father and His Son and followed the direction of the Son to restore the perfect gospel upon the earth. This is my solemn witness.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■



The Obong of Calabar, His Eminence, Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi Otu with his entourage and leaders of the Church.

Royal Highness Eso Ita Adim IV. The Obong's warriors were Otuekong Emmanuel Bassey Asuquo and Otuekong Asuquo Nyong Edet.

Commenting on the conference, the Obong commended the Church for recognizing the throne of Efik Kingdom: "The Palace of the Obong commends you for recognizing the Efik throne and we shall continue to participate in your activities," maintaining that he was uplifted by the various talks.

He added, "The talks were spiritually encouraging and the prayers too. We look forward to attending your activities. We are happy because the Church appreciated our presence. We are very thankful to God. We have heard all that the speakers said and we are encouraged."

Last year the Obong had met leaders of the Church, led by a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, Elder Edward Dube, and

Elder J. K. Chukwuemeka Igwe, an Area Seventy, as they paid him a courtesy visit in his palace in Adiabo Ikot Mbo in Calabar Municipal of Cross River State.

The stake conference saw the division of the Calabar Nigeria Stake, thus creating from the Calabar Nigeria Stake the Calabar Nigeria South Stake. It was well attended and members were excited about the growth in the Church and especially in Nigeria. ■

Archbishop Speich Meets with Latter-day Saint Leaders

His Excellency Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, Apostolic nuncio (an ecclesiastical diplomat representing the Holy See) in Ghana, met with leaders of the Africa West Area of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on May 17, 2016, including the Area President, Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr.

Meeting in the Africa West Area administrative offices, both leaders found they have much in common, including a lifetime of commitment to

their respective faiths and a desire to promote the teachings of Jesus Christ.

“We are very pleased that His Excellency, Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic nuncio from the Holy See to Ghana, accepted our invitation to visit the Africa West Area office and Accra Ghana Temple site,” said Elder Curtis. “We share a brotherhood in Christ and meet as friends,” commented Archbishop Speich. Elder Curtis noted, “Our meeting is an opportunity to build bridges of understanding.”

They talked on subjects of common interest such as strengthening the family, helping the less fortunate, and the blessings of Christian service. The Archbishop was particularly interested in the good that comes from LDS young single adults’ missionary service. He was very interested in the benefit that comes to the young people from such service. He also spoke of his efforts as a young parish priest to take the message of Christ to the people in their



Archbishop Speich takes a walk around the Latter-day Saint Accra Temple grounds.



From left : Elder John Koranteng, Elder LeGrand Curtis, Jr., Archbishop Jean Marie Speich, Monsignor Kocic, and Elder Yirenya-Tawiah. Archbishop Speich receiving a statue of Christ from Elder Curtis.

homes—not just waiting for them to come to the church building.

Archbishop Speich was accompanied by Monsignor Renato Kucic, Second Secretary and Deputy of Mission. Other Latter-day Saint leaders who joined in the discussions were Elder Daniel Yirenya-Tawiah and Elder John Koranteng, both Area Seventies (an Area Seventy is a local ecclesiastical leader assigned to supervise other Church leaders in specific geographic regions).

When describing the meeting between Elder Curtis and Archbishop Speich, Elder Koranteng said, “I saw two powerful ambassadors of the

Savior sharing their personal convictions and testimonies of the Savior’s work for mankind.”

Catholic and Latter-day Saint doctrines share a number of similarities regarding marriage, the family, and the complementary roles of mother and father in bearing and raising children. Protecting the rights of churches and individuals to discuss and promote these beliefs in a world where such values are vocally and even legally challenged is a cause that unites both faiths.

Both Archbishop Speich and Elder Curtis agreed to continue their friendship through continued association in the future. ■

here in Africa, and have been very impressed with the caliber of missionaries they see coming to the MTC.

“[When we served] in Europe about 95% of the missionaries were from North America, and [when we came here] we were surprised to see to see how many missionaries came from the continent of Africa. There are 80-100 new African missionaries coming every three weeks, and it’s just astounding to see how they are fulfilling their own need for missionaries in Africa so shortly after the gospel has been introduced here,” says President Brubaker.

“[These missionaries are] coming from lots of different countries with lots of different languages, and that’s a challenge. In Nigeria alone there are 26 to 23 major dialects for mother tongues, and if you are to take all of the countries in West Africa, there will be hundreds of different languages so most of them can’t understand each other in their mother tongues, but they’re very patient and helpful with each other.”

The typical stay for missionaries that do not have to learn a new language is three weeks. “Each class is divided down district lines. Usually we have 10 missionaries in a district. The majority of the missionaries will serve in their own country’s language (English or French), but we do have a few that are learning the other. For instance, you may have someone from

MISSIONARY

Now It’s Africa’s Turn!

New MTC President Excited by Great Future Ahead

Scott McDonald Brubaker, 63, along with his wife, Rebecca Patterson Brubaker, arrived in January to serve as President of the Ghana Missionary Training Center in Tema

The Brubakers, who reside in the Dutch Canyon Ward, Midway Utah Stake and have previously served as the President of the Belgium/Netherlands Mission, are enjoying the challenging and fulfilling work

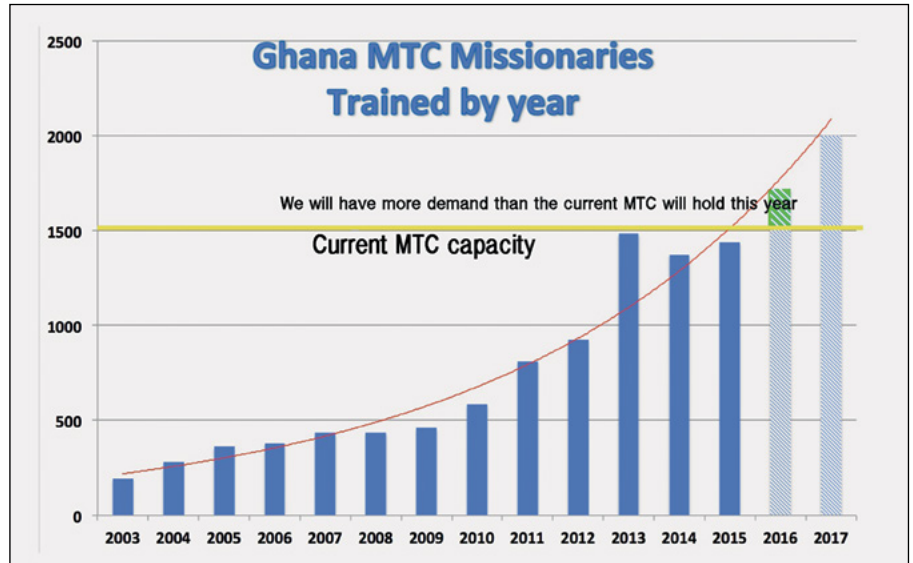
the Ivory Coast going to go to Ghana on a mission, then they have to learn English and it's a six-week program. If they don't know either English or French, then we have to decide which base language they fit into and put them in the district with the same basic language and help them to learn the new language.

“With the growth of the church in Africa the demand for more missionaries is increasing dramatically and the MTC in Ghana is quickly outgrowing its capacity. Every three weeks we have what we call an ‘intake’ (when we receive our new missionaries) and will receive somewhere between 60 to 90 missionaries.

“We are very close to capacity now. We plan to be at the maximum throughout the year. The new MTC is going to be a big change. Right now we can house up to 104 missionaries. The new MTC will accommodate around 340 missionaries. You will see from the graph that this year we will push past the maximum line. There is demand that we can't fulfill.

“Already there are 41 North American missionaries who will be trained in Provo by the August intake. We won't receive them here. They will enter the mission field from Provo and go directly to their African assignments.”

When discussing the preparation young people who anticipate filling a mission should undertake President Brubaker stated, “There are a number



of things they can do to help them be good missionaries, and then there are also a number of things they can do to help them adjust to missionary life. It's obvious that they need to be prepared to meet the standards of being a missionary. Missionaries need to come to the mission field worthy and that's not always the case. It's so much easier [to have taken care of any problems] before they come,

because if they have to leave early and go home to repent it's very hard on their self-esteem.

“A large part of what we see at the MTC is missionaries having to adjust to missionary life. If the missionary has never been away from home, it's almost always a harder proposition for them when he gets here. Missionaries who have had the opportunity to be around diverse types of peoples,



*President and
Sister Brubaker*

religions, age groups, and converse with them seem to have a leg up on those who spend all their time with their friends and never talk to a different group. It's important to talk to varied groups or types of people, particularly adults because by and large they're going to be teaching adults. If they can converse with adults, it's going to be very helpful to them."

When asked what he saw as the challenges going forward, President Brubaker replied that there is a concern that growth will exceed available leadership. "But from the worthiness I see in these young people there is a huge pool of leadership coming up. They are just amazing and will be wonderful leaders."

In conclusion President Brubaker summarized his impressions since coming to the Ghana MTC in this way, "In the early times of the church there was a great movement in England when thousands were baptized. This was followed in our day by a great movement in South America when thousands were baptized. But now, it's Africa's turn, and we will see thousands upon thousands baptized in Africa with exponential growth. The number of missionaries will easily double in three years. We're so excited that we can be a part of this thrilling time in this locality of the restoration of the gospel." ■

PRIMARY CHILDREN'S VOICES FROM SIERRA LEONE



My favorite scripture is 3 Nephi 18:21. It says, "Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed."

—*Frederick R. A., age 6, Lumley Ward, Freetown Stake*



I'm thankful to our Father in Heaven for bringing my family to the temple. This has been the dream of our family for several years. I'm happy we're sealed for time and all eternity. I know that the Church is true and that Jesus is the Christ. I love the scripture Job 14:14.

—*Marrietta F. H., age 10, Dwazark Ward, Freetown Stake*



I have a testimony on family home evenings because my family always feels the Spirit when we hold our family home

evenings. It makes us happy and helps us be kind to each other. I know this Church is true and that we have a living prophet, President Thomas S. Monson.

—*Joseph A. T., age 10, Congo Cross Ward, Freetown Stake*

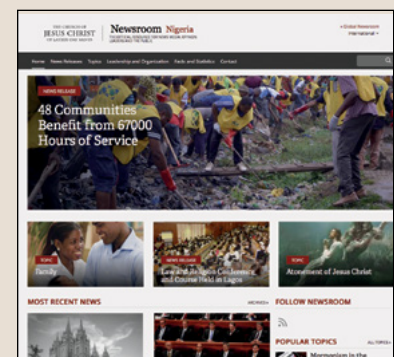
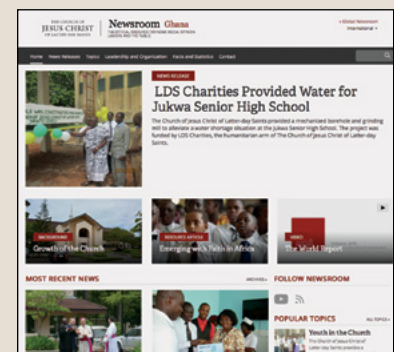
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