

AFRICA SOUTHEAST LOCAL PAGES

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Religious Liberty—a Function of Discipleship and Citizenship

By Elder Stanley G. Ellis

First Counselor in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency

Religious liberty is critical to our ability to live the gospel and establish the Church. I was recently assigned to represent the Church at the African Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ACLARS) Conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As a reminder of our doctrine in this regard, I will share my opening comments to the conference participants, as well as some scriptures that summarize our position as a Church and our individual responsibility as citizens.

Opening Remarks

This world has seen religious intolerance and persecution throughout its history. Our particular Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has personally experienced religious persecution. There are evil people throughout the world. And

there is a real source of evil that inspires them (call him the devil, or whatever you wish).

For all of us with a religious heritage, the saddest of all is when we mistreat each other. Some of the greatest atrocities of all time have been committed by religious people, in the name of religion, against other religious people! That is wrong!

We applaud this conference; being together, sharing our thinking with each other is doing good.

Let me share my personal experience. As a 17-year-old boy, I left our family farm in Idaho, USA, to live with a Brazilian family in São Paulo, Brazil, as an exchange student. I found out that Brazilians are people just like we are! (Often evil is able to be perpetrated by first vilifying those who will be the victims.) I remember thinking that

war would not be possible if we really knew the people on the other side.

Truth should be a great deterrent to evil, intolerance, and persecution. Knowing and sharing should be a great deterrent as well. Religious liberty is foundational to all our freedoms. May we appreciate the opportunity of this conference. May we fully participate in and benefit from it. Then may we go forth from here and stand for truth and for goodness! May we be influences for good in a religiously pluralistic society. One of the tenants of our Church is found in the eleventh Article of Faith: “We claim the privilege of worshipping the Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”



Stanley G. Ellis



Conference attendees visited a large mosque together. →

← Elder Stanley G. Ellis (center) with BYU Professor Cole Durham (left) and other religious leaders at the African Law and Religion Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia





Elder Stanley G. Ellis congratulates the key-note speaker, Professor An-Na'im.

Remember the statement “All it takes for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing!” May we go forth and do good. Thank you for being here and for your participation.

Selected Scriptures

Doctrine & Covenants 134:2, 4, 7, 9

“We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life. . . .

“We believe that religion is instituted of God; and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it, unless their religious opinions

prompt them to infringe upon the rights and liberties of others; but we do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul. . . .

“We believe that rulers, states, and governments have a right, and are bound to enact laws for the protection of all citizens in the free exercise of their religious belief; but we do not believe that they have a right in justice to deprive citizens of this privilege, or proscribe them in their

opinions, so long as a regard and reverence are shown to the laws and such religious opinions do not justify sedition nor conspiracy. . . .

“We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government, whereby one religious society is fostered and another proscribed in its spiritual privileges, and the individual rights of its members, as citizens, denied.”

Mosiah 29:26, 27

“Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people.

“And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgments of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.”

Doctrine and Covenants 98:10

“Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil.”

May we stand for truth and righteousness. May we be good citizens. May we support good people to lead us. ■



Dr. Mwinyihaji from Kenya was a speaker.

Alice N’Kom from Cameroon listened to translations of talks.



LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS

“My Bowels Are Filled with Compassion towards You”

By Elder Tasara Makasi

The Savior’s ministry is full of evidences of the divine attribute of compassion. According to the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, compassion is “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”¹ It motivates people to go out of their way to help physical, spiritual, or emotional pains of another. The root or origin of the word *compassion* is from Latin, meaning “co-suffering.” Hence in the Guide to the Scriptures, we find the following statement:

“Compassion means literally ‘to suffer with’” (“Compassion”).

One of the remarkable stories where Jesus Christ’s compassion is demonstrated is recorded in Luke chapter 7. The Savior and His disciples entered a city called Nain. Luke recounts:

“Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not” (Luke 7:12–13).

Jesus Christ then raised this young man from the dead and delivered him to his mother. This poor widow must have gone through a lot in her life, losing her husband and now her only son. We are not told of her pleading or petition to the Savior, but He saw her, had compassion on her, and raised her only son from the dead. The Savior reached out to her



Elder Tasara Makasi



The Good Samaritan,
by Walter Rane

unexpressed need, just as He does in our lives today when He answers prayers that may not have been verbalized. As His disciples, we can be like the people of the city of Nain. We are told that “much people of the city was with her” (Luke 7:11). They stood by this widow in her time of grief.

Also recorded in Luke chapter 7 is an account of the healing of the centurion’s servant. This servant “was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die” (Luke 7:2). The centurion sent messengers to the Savior to plead with Him to heal his servant. “Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed,” he said (Luke 7:7). The centurion had compassion on his servant. Amazing things happen as we plead with the Savior for those whom we love. We see in this account the faith of the centurion and not so much of the faith of the servant who was healed. President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said, “Inspiration comes more quickly when we need it to help others than when we are concerned about ourselves.”²

In answer to a question, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29), the Savior gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. One of the great lessons the Savior wants us to learn is summarized in His injunction, “Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Recently as I read this account, a new perspective came to me. I began to see that the Savior is teaching me

about who He is, His love, and His compassion towards me. He is represented in the story by the good Samaritan and I am represented by this man who was wounded, stripped of his clothes, and left half dead. The Savior has compassion on me and so through His atoning sacrifice, He binds up my wounds, “pouring in oil and wine” (Luke 10:34), taking me to the inn, and taking care of me. I then began to see the innkeeper as representing people such as bishops, spouses, and parents whom the Lord has asked to “take care of him” and promised “whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee” (Luke 10:35). My wounds are my own mistakes, my own sins, and also the sorrows, afflictions, disappointments, loneliness, frustrations, and a whole lot of infirmities which are our common lot in mortality.

The Savior expressed to the Nephites, “Behold, my bowels are filled with compassion towards you” (3 Nephi 17:6). He then asked them, “Have ye any that are sick among you? Bring them hither. Have ye any that are lame, or blind, or halt, or maimed, or leprous, or that are withered, or that are deaf, or that are afflicted in any manner? Bring them hither and I will heal them, for I have compassion upon you; my bowels are filled with mercy” (3 Nephi 17:7).

His invitation to the Nephites still stands today for me and you—we have to bring ourselves to Him so that

He can heal us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

What about our loved ones who may be “afflicted in any manner”? (3 Nephi 17:7). Some of them may be struggling with activity in the Church. How can we bring them to the Savior so that He can heal them? Can we learn something from the centurion who went out of his way to have his servant healed by the Savior? Can we learn something from the good Samaritan who did not judge but compassionately helped simply because help was needed?

Fifteen years ago I lost my young brother who was sick for a brief period. My parents and I did all we could using the meager resources we had to get the best medical care for him. After his death, as the oldest child, I was overwhelmed with the thought of “what else could I have done?” However, I felt the Spirit whispering peace to my heart, saying, “You have done all you could. This is my will.” I felt the Lord saying, “My bowels are filled with compassion towards you” and blessing me with the peace and comfort I needed so dearly at that time.

I testify that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, stands ready to heal us, “extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him” (Mosiah 29:20). ■

NOTES

1. Merriam–Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (2003), “compassion.”
2. Boyd K. Packer, “Prayers and Answers,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, pg. 19.



**Elder Carl B. Cook and
Sister Lynette Cook**

“Servant Leaders”: Lessons Learned from Elder and Sister Cook

By T. Ruth Randall, additional reporting by Virginia Graf

Elder and Sister Carl B. Cook have recently departed the Africa South East Area as Area President and wife. As they depart, some of those who worked and served closely with them reflect on the lessons they learned from them.

“One of Elder Cook’s greatest strengths is his ability to listen to what others have to say. He is thoughtful and strives to follow the voice of the Spirit,” said Elder Kevin S. Hamilton, who served as Elder Cook’s counselor and now takes his place as Area President.

Thomas Dube, publishing manager for the area, said he learned humility. “Elder Cook prefers to keep things

simple and is not a person who draws attention to himself,” said Thomas. “Instead, he always emphasizes the importance of following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He did this in practical ways, said Thomas. For example, he encouraged Church employees to choose less “glamorous” accommodations when traveling. “He led by example, by choosing to stay in more humble accommodations.”

Sean Donnelly, public affairs director for the area, said that Elder Cook represented a “servant leader.” “He was one of the best leaders I have worked with, and at the same time one of the best followers.”

Elder and Sister Cook were known to show love and kindness to all those with whom they interacted, from non-members to missionaries and everybody in between. “They loved the missionaries. Whenever they met some or addressed them, he and Sister Cook had huge smiles on their faces,” said Sean. “They loved meeting non-members and were so honoring of them.”

Said Thomas: “I always loved to watch Elder and Sister Cook’s interactions with ordinary members of the Church irrespective of who they were and where they came from. I could sense the deep love they had for the African Saints. There was always a



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deep and genuine connection in their conversations.”

The Cooks conveyed a powerful example of unity in marriage. “I observed in the temple what a celestial marriage looks like when Elder and Sister Cook enjoyed time in the celestial room,” said Paul Bester, area finance manager.

Bryan Jackson, Area Legal Counsel, said: “Elder Cook taught us that one roofing rafter can carry approximately 270 kilograms (595 lbs.) of roofing material, but when two roofing rafters are joined together with nails, they can carry a whopping 2000 kilograms (4,409 lbs.), or eight times that amount. This concept can be applied to the increase in strength that can come when two worthy children of our Heavenly Father are ‘sealed’ together in His holy temple. They are stronger by several multiples when they are joined together.”

Elder Cook taught that “if you start right, you will stay right,” said Paul Graf, Associate Area Legal Counsel.

He strove to follow the ultimate example. “One of the main things I learned from Elder Cook has been to emulate the Savior by being kind and thoughtful of others,” said Elder Hamilton. “He has reached out many times to others in need. We will never fully know of all the things that he has done because he does them quietly and without fanfare. He is focused on being a disciple of Christ.”

The Cooks made a “lasting contribution” to the area, said Elder Hamilton. “We will be ever grateful for their leadership and friendship.” ■

Flooding Botswana with Scriptures

By Sister Diane Davis Hawkins

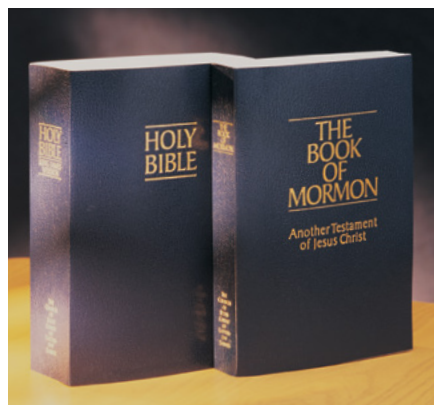
For some time, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ran an offer on **LDS.org** for free copies of the Bible. Sister Hawkins, an office missionary in the Botswana/Namibia Mission, shares how the people of Botswana, in fulfillment of the prophecy that the gospel will go forth “unto all people upon the face of the land” (3 Nephi 28:23), heard about and responded to this message. Here is her story in her own words:

“One Monday, one of the guards who worked at the Botswana Mission

office complex requested a Bible, so I went out and gave him a Bible and a copy of the Book of Mormon. I told him a little about the Book of Mormon, and asked him to read it. Later that day, I had another person come into our office and request the same thing. The following day, several people who worked at a business nearby stopped in at the office with the same request. I then decided to write up my testimony to include with the Book of Mormon, with my contact information on it if they had any questions.

“On the Wednesday morning from about 9:00 a.m., we had a steady stream of people coming into the office to request a ‘Bible’—some calling the Book of Mormon a Bible. We didn’t know what to do but to oblige them. Sometimes we had up to 10 people in the office at one time. For each person that called, I explained the Book of Mormon, invited them to read the book and to come back or call with questions.

“It was really exciting because I had never had something like that happen in all my life. To share my testimony with so many people was truly a miracle. Within a matter of four hours, we handed out around 120 sets of Bibles and copies of the Book of Mormon. I finally had to solicit the help of my husband and two other missionaries to attend to all the visitors. In each instance, I highlighted the invitation to



read the Book of Mormon in Moroni 10:3–5, put marking tabs on that page for easy reference, put in a pass-along card, printed off my testimony, and spoke to the visitor about the book.

“Later that day we had a man come back and introduce himself as a pastor. He wanted to know if we would give his congregation a Bible. One of our missionaries spoke to him for about 30 minutes and told him that he could send those who were interested over to the office and we would give them a Bible. The following day, the pastor returned with a member of his congregation. By then, we were out of Bibles and we only had about half a box of copies of the Book of Mormon left. Since then we have only been giving out copies of the Book of Mormon. I have already had one sister call me to thank me for the ‘Bible’ I gave her, which was actually a Book of Mormon. Others are now specifically requesting a Book of Mormon. Every day we have had a few visitors come in to ask for a book.

“That experience was such a miracle to me and has been the highlight of my mission so far. My patriarchal blessing said that many would join the Church because of my testimony, but at the time I never really understood how that would be fulfilled. It was only after this experience that I realized how the Lord had fulfilled His promise to me and the people who came for a ‘free Bible.’” ■

Windows of Heaven

By Verlene Cooper

As a convert to the Church having no doubt that marriage is ordained of God, and that being a stay-at-home mom is a noteworthy vocation, I found myself ill-prepared when after nearly 20 years of marriage, I was handed divorce papers. Circumstantial events left me with few belongings, no reserves, and minimal resources.

Feeling prompted to seek priesthood counsel and blessings, I was repeatedly instructed to forgive, to pay my tithing, and to hold my temple recommend as a sacred privilege! Although I sometimes felt challenged on all three of these principles, tithing was one that I had never previously had to take sole and personal accountability for, having shared this responsibility within a marriage union.

On receiving my first paycheck, knowing that it wouldn't even cover a third of my expenses, I opened my scriptures to Malachi 3:10 and tearfully read, “And prove me now herewith, . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” I understood that “proving” is a verb and requires a responsive faith-motivated action. With this seed planted, I committed to pay my tithing.



Verlene Cooper and her daughters

In doing this, my most abundant outpouring has been a fulfillment of President Heber J. Grant's (1856–1945) promise: “Growth in a knowledge of God, and in a testimony, and in the power to live the gospel and inspire our families to do the same.”¹

Temporal blessings of paying tithing have also transpired. Having lost a lot of weight subsequent to my divorce, my clothes were noticeably oversized. Filling in my tithing slip one Sunday, I prayed in earnest that I could go to work each day more suitably attired.

On returning home from church, my sister, who is a religious leader of another faith, contacted me. She related how a neighboring lady had stopped by her home and said that she was doing a “clean out” of her wardrobe. She inquired if my sister knew of anybody in need of clothes and shoes in three different sizes.

Two large suitcases were delivered, filled with seasonal clothing and shoes in exact sizes to accommodate not just



myself, but my two daughters as well. There were so many clothes that we could not fit it all into our wardrobe—“that there shall not be room enough to receive it”!

As I have paid my tithing, I have been blessed with firsthand experience of these inspired words from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “My beloved brothers and sisters, I testify of angels, both the heavenly and the mortal kind. In doing so I am testifying that God never leaves us alone, never leaves us unaided in the challenges that we face.”² Angels have come into my life when I needed them most.

My older daughter had the privilege recently of making a trip to the United States. Prior to her departure, she went to deposit her piggy bank of funds into her account at an ATM. As she did so, the machine malfunctioned and swallowed all of her money. All of her hard-earned savings were lost, just days before she was due to leave.

While our spirits sagged, a dear sister in the ward phoned us and asked us to come over to her house. While conversing with this special lady, she handed us a gift bag, saying

that it contained a small present from some “angels.” Inside, we discovered money bestowed by some named and some anonymous contributors. We were filled with emotion at this heavenly intercession. Within the week, the same daughter became terribly ill and the doctor’s bills depleted much of my salary. Out of desperation, I resorted to using money put aside for tithing, promising myself that somehow I’d find a way to repay the amount. With the weekend approaching, I was forced to weigh up the choice between paying for tithing or for living expenses.

As I got up that Sunday morning, in the spirit of fasting, I made the decision to faithfully pay my tithing. Upon entering the Relief Society room, I was handed another envelope. Words are inadequate to describe my feelings of humility when I discovered enclosed not just sufficient for my needs in replacing my tithing money but extra to spare.

Over the years, I have never been left alone without the comfort of Heavenly Father’s assurance that as we are obedient to the law of tithing, He more than compensates in every aspect of our lives. As the

words of one of our hymns remind us, “because of thy great bounty, Lord, each day I live.”³ ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 124.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Ministry of Angels,” *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 31.
3. “Because I Have Been Given Much,” *Hymns*, no. 219.

EDITOR’S NOTE

The Africa Southeast Area has a website that publishes messages from the Area Presidency as well as inspirational stories from members in Africa. Please visit us at africase.lds.org. ■

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