

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Our Primary Identity

By Elder Craig A. Cardon

First Counsellor, Pacific Area Presidency

With my service as a General Authority Seventy soon coming to an end, I have pondered and prayed to know the message the Lord would have me share with you, my beloved brothers and sisters of the Pacific. The answer has come in part as a result of my experience during my 12 years of service—five in the Africa West Area, five at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, and now concluding with two here in the Pacific.

The Pacific Area is blessed with a wide variety of national origins and cultural diversity. This is evidenced in Micronesian, Melanesian, and Polynesian origins, as well as in the more recent European and Asian influences. While there has been much blending of peoples and cultures, there often remain distinct cultural practices with which people in the Pacific claim identity. However, apart from these mortal identities, the Lord is interested in how we identify ourselves spiritually in our hearts and souls and outwardly to our associates. This is our primary identity, and it is this primary identity that I wish to address.

“The Family—A Proclamation to the World” speaks of identity, saying: “All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or

daughter of heavenly parents. . . . Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”¹

This is the first and foremost identity for our Father’s children coming to earth: spirit sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents. But there is more.

King Benjamin presided over the people of Zarahemla, who were comprised of Mulekites and Nephites.² Although sharing a common heritage from which they were removed by just a few hundred years, in a relatively brief period of time they had developed distinct identities. Even their languages had become different,



Elder Craig A. Cardon



until the Mulekites were taught in the language of Mosiah.³ After teaching the people the gospel of Jesus Christ, King Benjamin recognized the need for the people to have an identity founded in the gospel that would always prevail in their hearts and be made known outwardly, having priority over any other earthly identity:

“And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; . . . for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

“Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”

(Doctrine and Covenants 38:27)



“. . . There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ.”⁴

For us in the Church, this is our next most important identity: children of Christ, having been born of Him. When this identity prevails, the people and the Lord’s purposes prosper. When ethnic or cultural identities crowd out this identity as children of Christ, contentions easily arise and God’s people forfeit the blessings of the Spirit.

Mormon records the following sad circumstance arising just prior to Christ’s appearance following His Resurrection when the people failed to identify themselves as spirit sons and daughters of God and as children of Christ:

“And the people were divided one against another; and they did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends. . . .

“. . . They did yield themselves unto the power of Satan. . . .

“And they did cause a great contention in the land.”⁵

Within the Church and kingdom of God, if ethnic identity or even family identity prevails over our spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood and over our being children of Christ, the Spirit is grieved. In our stakes, missions, districts, wards, and branches, rather than first being Australian, New Zealander, Papua New Guinean, New

Caledonian, Ni-Vanuatu, Solomon Islander, Marshallese, Kiribati, Fijian, Tongan, Samoan, French Polynesian, or any other ethnic identity, we must first be sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents, brothers and sisters, and children of Christ, having been born of Him.

I love you, my dear brothers and sisters, and bear witness that Jesus Christ lives and is our Savior. May we

heed His counsel: “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine,”⁶ that He may say of us, “And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind.”⁷ ■

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
2. See Omni 1:15; Mosiah 25:2.
3. See Omni 1:17–18.
4. Mosiah 5:7–8.
5. 3 Nephi 7:2, 5, 7.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
7. Moses 7:18.

LOCAL PAGES

Apostles Meet with Sydney Saints

By Mormon Newsroom

Saints in Sydney were treated to a special visit earlier in May from President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Elder Gary E.

Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The Apostles, along with other Church leaders, attended stake conferences on Sunday morning



President Ballard urged each member of the stake to “be a missionary”.

in Baulkham Hills, Prairiewood and Penrith.

The Baulkham Hills stake was visited by President Ballard, who urged each member of the stake to “be a missionary. Be more bold in sharing what you know to be true. Don’t think you can’t do it. We must do it. We have everything we need to bring the great message of the Restoration to everyone.”

He declared, “The gospel message is simple. Keep it simple and do what you can to help people feel the simplicity of this glorious message.”

To those of other faiths, and no faith, he extended an invitation. “Keep all that is good and true and let us share with you the fulness of all that God has revealed in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times.”

Elder Craig A. Cardon, First Counsellor in the Pacific Area Presidency, also bore his testimony: “Our loving Heavenly Father has seen fit to give us instructions in the scriptures concerning our duties and responsibilities. The Lord is bringing forth the things that will bring us the greatest happiness.”

Craig Willson, bishop of the Kellyville Ward, said, “We were absolutely thrilled to hear from President Ballard. We felt encouraged, motivated. We felt the Saviour’s love in his encouragement for us to strive a little better and to share the gospel in a natural way with our friends and others around us.”



President Ballard spoke to the members of the Baulkham Hills stake.

Elder Stevenson greets the members of the Prairiewood stake.



Paul Gray of the Winston Hills Ward shared, “It is just amazing to have an Apostle here and to have him speak to us about the things that we need to do and to feel the spirit that comes from seeing an Apostle.”

In the Prairiewood stake, Elder Stevenson focused his remarks on “ministering,” referring to it as something holier and higher.

He said, “We live in a time when the heavens are open. President Manoussou has been called and given keys and is ‘turning them.’”

Elder Stevenson taught how ministering and missionary work go hand in hand and that ward and stake leaders can use missionaries in their ministering.

Elder Ian S. Ardern, Second Counsellor in the Pacific Area Presidency, urged the members of the stake to love one another, to be more tenderhearted, to be more forgiving of each other, to be more Christlike and to increase in their service.

After the Prairiewood conference, Sister Molie Maka’afi, a full-time missionary in the Australia Sydney South

Mission, said, “Our conference with Elder Stevenson was amazing. It was a room of revelation and love. He has helped me to be able to fulfil my baptismal covenants in a better way.”

In the Penrith stake, Elder Carl B. Cook of the Presidency of the Seventy invited members to ponder how they have been blessed by keeping the commandments and to look for opportunities to stretch themselves and do beyond what they think is possible.

Elder Cook also quoted President Ballard: “We must go on. We must wear out our lives. We must eliminate distractions and disruptions that stop us from missionary work.”

Elder O. Vincent Haleck, Pacific Area President, spoke about tithing and temple attendance. He said, “We need to keep the blessings of paying full tithing to receive the blessings that come from it. We need more of you attending [the temple] more often than you do.”

The Penrith stake Relief Society president, Sister Merril Betham, shared her reflections on the conference: “It was a reminder of the blessings we have and to constantly share it with others through our ministry and through sharing the gospel with others.”

The visit from these leaders through Sydney lifted spirits, healed hearts and blessed all who participated throughout the weekend. ■

Changed through Christ

By Shilo Kino

Most people wouldn't recognize Jath Kevener if they saw him today. The old Jath had 23 piercings on his face and liked walking around shirtless so others could see his tattoos. People used to cross the street to avoid him, he said.

“I did my best to make sure no one wanted to be around me.”

Jath was in a dark place, tangled up in a world of drugs and alcohol.

“I remember waking up and drinking from a bottle that was left from the night before and then walking to the bottle shop to get more.

“All day I would just sit at home smoking. I was heavily addicted to methamphetamine and a raging alcoholic.”

It was only years earlier that Jath, 23 at the time, was a new convert to

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“I always had questions other religions weren't able to answer to my satisfaction,” he said. “When I came to understand the plan of salvation, it really resonated with my heart. I gained a testimony of Heavenly Father and Christ. And after two months of praying, I got my testimony of the Book of Mormon.”

But a year after his baptism, things changed dramatically for Jath.

“I moved to the suburbs and I didn't go for the first week to church, and then every week after that it became easier and easier not to go,” he said. “I tried to do everything on my own and didn't ask for help when I needed. I wasn't fellowshipping with the right type of people either.”

Jath's life spiralled out of control and he became physically and mentally dependent on drugs.

“At the time, I was doing my best not to think about the gospel. I would



Jath hopes his story will help those who are going through similar trials.

tell myself, 'I'm still a good person.' I'd go past the chapel on the way to the city and I would shy away from looking. I knew the chapel was there and Heavenly Father knew I wasn't there. It was guilt and shame, knowing I was doing something I shouldn't be doing."

In 2015, 12 years after his baptism, the missionaries knocked on Jath's door.

"They freaked out a bit because I had a really scary pit bull, I had piercings all over my face and I was running around with my T-shirt off in 20-degree weather."

Jath allowed the missionaries to re-teach him but continued to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol.

But it was a visit from his stake presidency that changed everything.

"The stake president and his counsellor asked me to come back to church, and I just looked at them and said, 'Yup'. I knew it wasn't them asking; it was Heavenly Father asking. I didn't have any excuses."

Since he came back to church, Jath said, things have just fallen into place.

"I used to be very disillusioned with the world," he said. "Once I went back to church, I had purpose. Now I wake up, open the Book of Mormon, do some reading and my day is instantly better.

"I'm way happier, and it's not just because I'm not on drugs anymore, but it's because I think about the big picture now. It helps with the little trials. Trials are always going to be

there—but now I'm grateful for them."

Jath also decided to remove all his piercings from his face. "If I want to be the best Christian I can be, I need to take those steps to do those things I know Christ is happy with," he said. "My piercings were a shield stopping other people from conversing with me."

He is grateful for the members who minister to him.

"If it wasn't for the stake president and his counsellor coming over, I would probably be in jail," he said.

"The members are lovely people who will make the effort to call me up and invite me for dinner. They want me to do well, and they are doing their best to make sure I am staying in church. Because I can see the hard work their putting in, I'm putting in the hard work too."

Jath enjoys serving as the secretary for the elders quorum presidency in the Prospect Ward in Adelaide, Australia.

He hopes his story will help those who are going through similar trials. "You're never that lost," he said. "You are never too far away from Heavenly Father. He will always put in the effort to get us back, but we need to put in effort ourselves.

"I've grown so much over the last year both spiritually and emotionally. I look back and think if it wasn't for Heavenly Father and Christ, I wouldn't be here.

"It's a matter now of waking up in the morning and saying thank you." ■

Keeping the Sabbath Helped Her Land Her Dream Job

By Shilo Kino

A stint at the biggest opera company in the world is a career highlight for Candice MacAllister. And she's only getting started. Candice, in her own words, is "living the dream".

At just 23 years old, Candice has designed costumes for big opera productions such as *Cinderella*, *The Princess and the Pea*, and *The Snow Queen*, and she has interned at the Royal Opera House in London.

"There's something really satisfying when the house lights go down, everyone's sitting there, they've bought a ticket, you hear the orchestra tuning . . . and you see everything you have worked for happen. It's wonderful."

Candice's interest in art began as a student attending Marrayatville High School in Adelaide. She loves music and plays multiple instruments. However, when a drama teacher suggested she design the costumes for a year 12 high school play, Candice jumped at the opportunity. That, Candice said, changed everything.

Candice studied diligently at school and received an Australian Tertiary



Keeping the Sabbath day holy has helped Candice stay close to the Saviour throughout her journey.

Admission Rank of 99, well above the national average. This meant Candice could gain entry into almost any university she wanted.

“All my friends asked if I was going to study law or medicine, and I said, ‘No, I’m going to study costume and set design,’” she said. “Technically in my career, I didn’t need a degree. But I knew by obtaining one I would gain experience and learn valuable skills. A degree would prepare me for work and for life.”

Candice moved to Melbourne and studied at Victorian College of the Arts, which is an extension of the University of Melbourne.

“I didn’t know any other members who were doing this kind of job,” Candice said. “I was worried if I had to work on Sunday or work on a show where the performers were nude . . . I wondered how I was going to deal with it.”

Two months after graduating in 2015, Candice started work at Victorian Opera as an administration assistant—a job Candice nicknamed the “glorified coffee runner”.

“After I graduated I looked at every company in Australia,” she said. “I was happy to do anything—cleaning

toilets, anything at all. My role was very basic admin and paperwork, but I thought, ‘Great, my foot is in the door. I might not design anything for a few years, but at least I can be around designers, directors and meet people. And if it’s boring, at least I have a job.’”

Within two months of working, Candice landed her first big break.

“One of the designers dropped out, so my boss turned to me and said, ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do. I don’t have anyone lined up.’ I told her, ‘I’ll give you some ideas and see if you like them.’”

Candice spent that weekend studying the production and coming up with ideas. Her boss, Candice said, loved her ideas.

“So, my five-year goal to design a small-scale professional show for a professional company I had achieved in three months,” Candice said.

A month later, another designer dropped out and Candice again put up her hand.

“Last year I did three shows and became a developing artist designer for two shows, which is an honour.”

Candice is based in Glen Huntly, Melbourne, and is now working on

Pelléas et Mélisande, an opera by Claude Debussy.

“There are so many things I thought I could never do, but when I put my trust and faith in my Saviour . . . I know it is going to be okay.”

“My favourite scripture is Proverbs 3:5. Trusting in the Lord and always acknowledging Him—it is something I’ve always tried to do.”

Keeping the Sabbath day holy has helped Candice stay close to the Saviour throughout her journey.

“When we go on tour, I always try and go to church. Everyone in the company will go out for breakfast and I will tell them, ‘I’m going to church’. It’s important when I’m away that the 40 other people in the company are aware of my values. I found that not hiding my light and acknowledging the Lord has opened so many doors and blessings that I never could have imagined. When I put Heavenly Father first, keeping the Sabbath is never an issue. It’s been a massive blessing.”

Every Tuesday night, Candice serves the young women in her ward as the first counselor in the Young Women presidency.

“Even though I’m tired after work, I know just that little bit of sacrifice and giving up a bit of time brings many blessings.”

And she emphasises the value of hard work and education.

“Good things don’t come easily,” she said. “If there is something you want

to do, and it seems hard, it's probably worth it. Work hard in whatever education you choose, whether that's a degree, an apprentice, a course. If you're going to spend the time doing it, make it worth it.

The future is bright for Candice, who hopes to work in London and New York for West End productions and Broadway.

"For me, costume and set design isn't about making clothes and pretty

things," she said. "It's visual storytelling. You get a script and you analyse the people and think, 'Why would they wear what they wear? What does the audience need to feel?' It brings me so much joy.

"I don't quite know exactly how I got here, but I just trust Heavenly Father. The doors keep opening, and every time they do, I say, 'Heavenly Father, I'm going to go through this door, and if it's not meant to be, just tell me.'" ■

go, and I was hopeful. At that time, I didn't understand where that hope came from."

In what Thai describes as a miracle, the government changed its law in 1978. Anyone could leave the country—but at a cost.

"As long as you paid a large amount of gold, you could leave," he said. "That amount of gold could feed my family for a year."

Six months later, another miracle occurred. An old friend of Thai's father helped the family with the cost. That meant Thai could escape with his whole family.

On 27 February 1979, Thai and his family left the shores of Vietnam on a boat. Two other boats left at the same time.

The smallest boat sank due to stormy weather, and 300 people lost their lives. The biggest of the three boats carrying 750 people was robbed by sea pirates.

From Child Refugee to Branch President

By Shilo Kino

When Tai Do was 14 years old, his mother asked him to leave Vietnam with his youngest sister.

"They warned me that it would be a risky journey and I might die," he said. "Or if I was caught, I would face jail or be executed."

The year was 1976 and the Vietnam War had just ended. Thai and his family were living in extreme conditions.

"Many public executions took place, and as a young child I witnessed two of those executions," Thai said.

"If you had two meals in one day, that was luxury living. My parents felt there was no future for us in Vietnam, so I would escape with my younger sister. They only had enough gold to

pay the boat fare for two people."

Thai accepted he might never see his parents and siblings again. "But I remember having no fear in my heart," Thai said. "I was prepared to



Thai is now the branch president of the new Vietnamese branch in Melbourne.

The boat Thai's family were on took a different route. After three days, they arrived at a deserted island in Malaysia.

But there was no food on that island, Thai said. "With 384 people stranded, we quickly ate all that we had brought with us within a week. I still remember very clearly that I was paralysed for a whole day due to eating poisonous wild vegetation."

Two months later, they were rescued by the Red Cross and brought to an island in Malaysia housing 50,000 refugees. Five months later, Thai and his family finally landed in Australia.

Thai's parents worked 16 hours a day, "because they wanted us to obtain a degree and education," he said.

Although it was difficult, Thai majored in statistics and applied maths at Monash University in Melbourne. He met his wife Shirley at university, and they married in August 1993. A year later, their son Anthony was born.

However, life soon changed dramatically for the Do family.

In 2002, the IT telecommunication sector collapsed, and Thai lost his job. He spent months searching for employment but had no success.

"I'm a man of dignity and pride, but I couldn't even provide a meal for my son," he said. "I was devastated. It was like 1976 repeating itself."

Around the same time, Shirley met missionaries and was baptised into

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"I told her she is free to do what she wants, as long as she doesn't drag me into it," he said. "But when I lost my job my wife told me, 'If you need help, all you need to do is to ask God with faith and your prayers will be answered'. I was at the lowest point of my life, so I thought, it won't hurt if I tried."

Thai locked himself in his bedroom, got on his knees and cried to the Lord for help.

Two days later, he watched a Church video with Shirley and seven-year-old Anthony.

"I thanked God silently in my heart for my family. . . . After expressing my appreciation, I felt tremendous joy, peace and warmth. As I looked towards the picture of Jesus Christ, the same picture I prayed in front of, I saw a glow.

"I looked at my son and my wife. Both were watching television, unaware of what was transpiring at that time. I walked out of the room, and as I stopped at the door, I looked at the picture again. The intense glow was still there.

"Suddenly, my wife asked me, 'So, when are you ready to see the missionaries?' Without hesitation I said, 'I'm ready.'"

Thai was baptised in 2002, four months after his wife, Shirley, joined the Church. But it was not an easy journey, he said.

Thai had been smoking for more than 20 years.

"The elders advised me that there were two options available to giving up my addiction," he said. "I could seek professional help, but this would cost a lot of money. Or they could give me a priesthood blessing, and that would cost no money. I took the free option."

The blessing helped Thai completely rid himself of his addiction. He has not touched a cigarette since his baptism.

And the blessings kept coming. Soon after Thai was baptized, his ex-manager called and offered him a job. Two of his clients also called, wanting to do business with him. Thai found full-time employment and is still working for this company now as a team leader.

Since Thai joined the Church, he has been involved in many leadership callings. In March this year he was called to be the branch president of the Melbourne 3rd Branch, the first Vietnamese branch created in Australia. Its boundaries cover all seven stakes in Victoria and currently has 204 members.

"The Lord's hand was always in my life; I just didn't realize at the time," Thai said. "He brought me from the lowest points in my life and lifted me up. Escaping Vietnam wasn't luck—because of the hard times I went through, it strengthened my character and moulded me as a person. And now I'm a changed man." ■