

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

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 Kiwi Saints

By Shilo Kino



Alieta Uelese from Hastings shakes hands with President M. Russell Ballard.

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 made a special visit to Aotearoa earlier this year.

The Apostles spoke to both members and missionaries in Wellington

before they traveled to Sydney, Australia.

President Ballard shared a question with Church leaders, asking, “How do we get the gospel from the minds of our people deeply into their hearts sufficiently to feel the urgency to reach out to serve one another as Jesus Christ showed?”

As leaders, we are “ministering for the Lord Jesus Christ,” he said. “We are shepherding one another, and loving one another, along the covenant path. We are learning how to love as Jesus did.”

President Ballard also said, “Sacrament meeting can be a time we come to the feet of Christ, in a sense, and worship Him.”

“We can ask others to ‘come see; come worship with us.’”

He promised, “If our youth have spiritual experiences in sacrament meetings, they will be stronger.”

He added, “The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of love, of repentance, of forgiveness, of changing lives for the better.”

“Each soul is very precious, particularly to the Saviour. As we minister to each individual, one more soul is embraced by the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.”

Elder Stevenson talked about a recent adjustment in the way Latter-day Saints minister to each other and to those who are not members of the Church as a “higher and holier way.”



**Latter-day Saints
in Wellington**



**Natalie Hardy and Amy Brunton
enjoyed hearing from the two Apostles.**



**President M. Russell M. Ballard
with missionaries in Wellington**

“We are the Church of Jesus Christ,” he said, “so our ministering should be as He has ministered.”

He added, “As we learn of Christ, follow Him, and become like Him, we will minister to each other in His way.”

Elder Stevenson talked about the people of Alma in the Book of Mormon, “how their hearts were knit together in love, mourning with those who mourn, comforting those who stood in need of comfort.”

Elder O. Vincent Haleck, President of the Pacific Area, spoke about the relationship between the doctrine of Christ and ministering to one another.

“Christ taught His doctrine with words and with action,” he said.

“As we read from the Book of Mormon every day, the Lord will bless us with spiritual insights that will help us minister to others.”

In another meeting, President Ballard told 120 young and senior missionaries, “It takes faith to be a full-time missionary, to get on your knees and call down the powers of heaven, to represent Jesus Christ.”

“Telling people the experience of Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove in 1820 is one of the most important experiences we can share.”

“Heavenly Father loves His children enough,” he added, “to send a prophet to teach us how to draw closer to God and His Son Jesus Christ.”

“There is a prophet of the living God upon the earth today,” President Ballard said, “and Apostles, who all teach and testify of Jesus Christ.”

President Ballard urged each missionary to “radiate the love and power of Jesus Christ.”

Elder Stevenson urged the missionaries to help those they are teaching to understand the promises that God has extended to individuals who obey His commandments.

He encouraged the missionaries to pray and to study the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ.

Elder Stevenson promised the missionaries that as they do these things they will be closer to God and those around them. These promises, he said, also apply to the people they teach.

Natalie Hardy, from Porirua, said, “What stood out to me is the focus on loving and ministering to the individual, similar to how the Saviour taught us, every soul is precious. Also, how we

need to prepare more fully to serve those around us, to strive for more charity, converting our gospel knowledge into action, seeking for more personal inspiration through the Holy Ghost to know how to assist others and to have a change in our hearts.”

Also from Porirua, Amy Brunton said, “I had such an overwhelming sense of love during the meeting. I felt the love that President Ballard and Elder Stevenson had for all those who were at the meeting. I felt the love that the leaders of the Church have for our Saviour, Jesus Christ. And most importantly, I felt the love that Heavenly Father has for each one of His children and that He desperately wants us all to feel that love.” ■

“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 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

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.



It was a visit from his stake presidency that helped bring Jath back to church.

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.” ■

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.

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.



Thai Do is the branch president of the new Vietnamese branch in Melbourne, Australia.

“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 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.

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." ■

MISSIONARY MOMENT

The Lord Used Me as His Instrument

By Danielle D'Costa

Seven years ago I made the decision to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a decision that wasn't treated lightly and a decision that altered the entire course that I was on. Missionaries and members invested time in me and I didn't really understand why, but now I do.

If someone told me seven years ago that I would serve a mission, I'd have dismissed the thought. A mission was never in my plan, but it was always in God's plan for me. It just took me a while to accept that.

My first transfer in the mission came at a devastating time. My companion and I had labored intensively to build up our current area and it was blooming with people to teach, so selfishly I wanted to stay. I was being transferred to an area nicknamed the armpit of my mission. I would hear from people around me that it would all be okay, that if I didn't find or prepare someone for baptism, it didn't matter because it was a hard area. This frustrated me and I was determined to change that.

A few weeks into the transfer my new companion and I were working harder than ever. We found people to teach but no one was progressing. Our prayers became more earnest; we took our studies more seriously because we were on a mission to find ‘the one’. One evening we knocked on the door of someone we had high amounts of hope for, only to be turned away and told not to come back. As we made the long walk home, it started to rain, further dampening our mood. I started to believe the words of others, that this place was dead, that there was no one ready here. I know that there were silent prayers being expressed as we walked. After what felt like hours we made it back to the flat. Feeling defeated, I asked my companion to offer a prayer. Immediately as the word “amen” was uttered the phone rang. It was a miracle by the name of Ali. He had received a copy of the Book of Mormon months earlier and had read the account of Joseph Smith being visited by the angel Moroni. Ali had questions and demanded that he meet with us the next day.

We met with Ali, who initially had no intention of being baptized but simply wanted to know what the gospel was all about, how it was possible that Joseph Smith saw an angel and if angels really existed. This, of course, excited us and we continued to meet with and teach



SUPPLIED

Danielle served in the England London Mission.

Ali. We brought members along to lessons, and Ali would quiz each one of them on how they recognized the Holy Ghost. One day Ali called us and told us that he got down on his knees and offered what he described as the most sincere prayer of his life. He expressed that he felt what those members had felt—he felt the Holy Ghost. He told us that God wanted him to be baptized. Ali to this date has sacrificed everything to be a member of this Church.

Towards the end of my mission I received a visit from Ali in my new area. With little contact with him until that point, I worried about Ali and how he might be doing. What he shared with me increased my love and testimony of the Savior. Ali had faithfully been going to church each week. He began going out every night to teach with the missionaries and would even feed them. He received the Melchizedek Priesthood and loved blessing and passing the sacrament. He was asked to speak at a stake conference, and he was planning on serving a full-time mission. I remember tears filling my eyes because of how far Ali had come. I also remember

thinking that none of this was my own doing, that I was simply doing what Heavenly Father needed me to do, to be an instrument in His hands.

Because of the experiences on my mission, I know my Savior even more now. I understand how He is in the details of our lives. I know what He is capable of and I know His love and I love Him. I’m grateful for the blessing it was to serve a mission, to have met people who now mean the world to me. To imagine that at one point I didn’t want to serve a mission is now such a foreign thought.

One of the greatest lessons I learnt on my mission was that Heavenly Father didn’t really need me. He could’ve used anyone, but He *wanted* me there to see and to experience what He could make of me. He was going to show me exactly how He could help people to change and how He was going to turn me into an instrument in His hands.

I now understand the miracle and blessing it is to serve a full-time mission. I feel very grateful towards my Father in Heaven and to my Savior, Jesus Christ, for the opportunity to see people’s lives change and to have my life changed. To have experienced what missionaries must have experienced when they were teaching me was such a tender moment in my life. ■

Danielle served in the England London Mission from May 2016 to December 2017.