

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Making a Difference

By Elder David J. Thomson

Area Seventy



Elder David J. Thomson

In the book of Jude in the New Testament we find these simple words: “And of some have compassion, making a difference” (Jude 1:22). There are many ways that we can make a difference in our own family, in our ward or branch and in the community. Our compassion is a product of faith and hope and is closely linked to charity, which we know is an attribute of the Saviour.

One of the objectives of the work that you and I do in building the kingdom of God is to increase faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Atonement. My hope today is that as you consider what you will read, your faith will grow into a desire to act for the salvation of others and that you will feel prompted to make a difference by preparing to serve as a senior missionary.

Several years ago, Elder David B. Haight (1906–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counselled: “The goal of every physically able couple in the Church, just as it is for every . . . young man in the Church, should be to serve a mission. No finer example can be given, no finer testimony can be borne by parents to children or grandchildren, than through

missionary service in their mature years” (“My Neighbor—My Brother!” *Ensign*, May 1987, 61).

Years later in general conference, President Thomas S. Monson turned his attention to more mature members with this very specific call for senior couples:

“And now to you mature brothers and sisters: *we need many, many more senior couples*. To the faithful couples now serving or who have served in the past, we thank you for your faith and devotion to the gospel

of Jesus Christ. You serve willingly and well and accomplish great good.

“To those of you who are not yet to the season of life when you might serve a couples mission, I urge you to *prepare now* for the day when you and your spouse might do so. As your circumstances allow, as you are eligible for retirement, and as your health permits, make yourselves available to leave home and give full-time missionary service. There are few times in your lives when you will enjoy the sweet spirit and satisfaction that come



from giving full-time service together in the work of the Master” (“As We Meet Together Again,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 6; emphasis added).

You will note that as well as expressing gratitude for those who do serve, President Monson urged the rest of us to prepare now. That invitation was issued seven years ago. I wonder if we have exercised faith sufficient to respond to that call from our prophet to prepare to serve. Those of us who heard his words seven years ago are now seven years closer to the time he spoke of when we might be able to serve.

In my Church service I have seen the Lord’s work grow and progress through senior couples serving in a variety of ways. Here are a few examples from my area.

Elder and Sister Damron are currently serving in the New Zealand Hamilton Mission as member-leader support. Their mission plans were delayed a bit while they cared for an elderly relative, but now they are here loving and supporting the local members and helping build the branches where they have been assigned.

Elder Joe Hay and Sister Sue Hay are full-time Church-service missionaries working as directors at Camp Tuhikaramea in Temple View, New Zealand. After retiring, there was nothing they wanted to do more than serve at the camp to help our young people who come there to enjoy their



experience learning and growing in the gospel.

Elder Alan Templeton and Sister Jan Templeton have served several missions in far-off places like Russia and the USA and recently completed a service mission, serving full-time in the New Zealand Hamilton Mission office while still living at home. They have received their call for their next mission to Ghana.

Some of us spent many years helping and supporting young people as they prepared for missionary service—now it’s our turn!

Preparing for a senior mission takes time and effort, so best to start that preparation sooner rather than later. There are lots of things you can do right now to prepare, even if you’re not in circumstances which would enable you to start serving soon:

- Assess your financial position—do you have savings, access to pension funds, or other resources that could help you serve? Are there financial commitments you need to resolve before serving?
- Consider your health, skills, experience and personal situation. This

will help you determine where and how you may want to serve and for how long—senior missions are generally between 6 and 23 months’ duration.

- Discuss your mission plans with your family and seek their support and commitment to help.
- Continue to study and live the gospel, pray and serve in your ward or branch while you prepare.

One of my favourite scriptures is the words of Peter, the Apostle, speaking to the household of Cornelius about his beloved Saviour. He described Jesus as one “who went about doing good . . . ; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). In your own nation and across the Pacific and the world, the Lord is calling faithful couples to serve in a variety of different ways, adapted to the capacity of any of us. He is offering us the opportunity to do some good. There will be something you can do to make a difference. I testify that this service will change your life and your family in time and in eternity. I pray we will each have the faith to answer the call of our prophet to serve our Master, Jesus the Christ. ■

LOCAL PAGES

A Journey to Motherhood

By Celeste Kaka

Celeste was diagnosed with cancer shortly after she married her husband, George. Here she talks about their journey to becoming parents and the challenges involved.

As I got older and soon after being married, the idea of having a family was all I wanted. I kept telling my husband, George, how life is short and if we started trying for kids now and had any setbacks, I'd have the time to seek the medical attention I would need. Little did I know the medical attention I needed would be a lot sooner than we thought.

Once we found out I needed to have chemotherapy to cure the cancerous lump in my leg, my doctors suggested doing IVF (in vitro fertilization) where they would essentially retrieve eggs from my body and freeze them until we were ready to start trying to have a family. I remember when they told me, and I was like, "Why the heck do I need to do IVF?" I'd learnt about it in high school, so I knew what it was, but it still didn't make sense to me that I needed to do it.

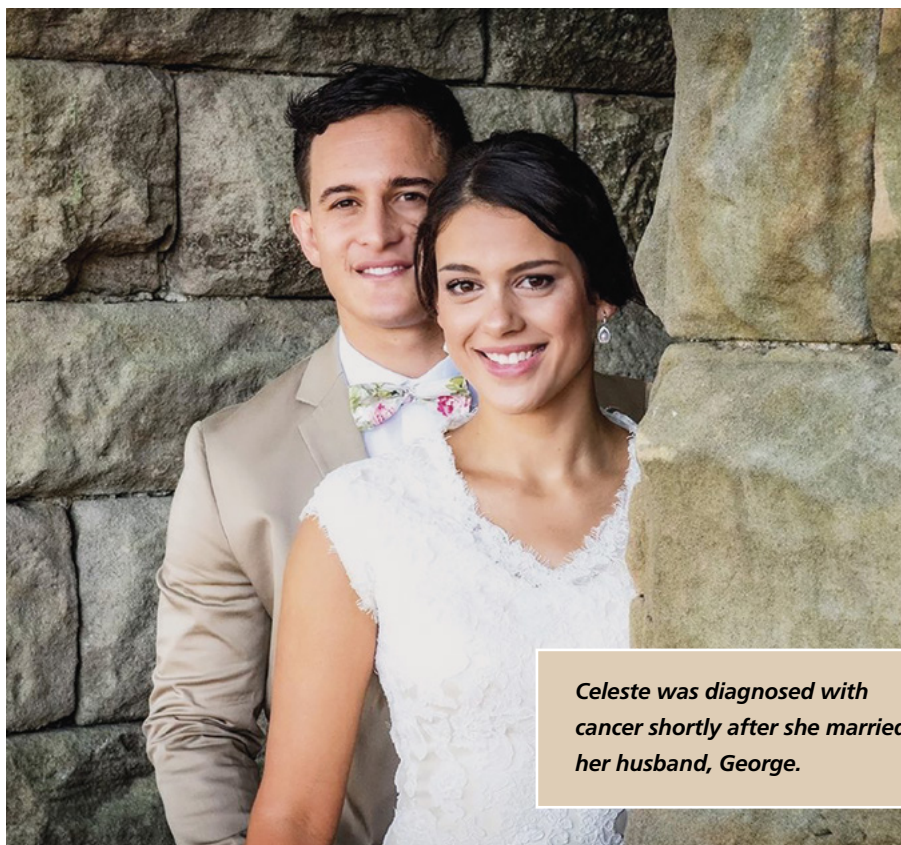
Then the doctors told me, "Chemo can affect your chances of being fertile and conceiving children, so if you did IVF, you'd increase the likelihood of having a family post chemo."

So that is where my IVF experience began.

You know how if you're in a waiting room and someone walks in, everyone stops what they're doing just to look at the person? Well, yeah, when my husband and I walked into the waiting room on the first day of my IVF cycle, that's what happened. Not in a rude way; I think more in a curious way, like, "They look a little young to be doing IVF" (I mean, most people thought I was way too young to get married, so I'm sure many more thought trying to start a family young was a little crazy). We took our seats

and I took a look around. I saw couples, women who had come by themselves or with their older children and women who were accompanied by friends. Essentially it was a great mix of people coming for different reasons yet hoping for the same result.

It was a really humbling experience for me to get a glimpse of the unspoken pains behind conceiving a child. I wondered how many times these women had done IVF, if they'd been successful or not, or how much of a financial strain it was. One lady came in, got her injection and blood tests and left straight to work! These



SUPPLIED

Celeste was diagnosed with cancer shortly after she married her husband, George.



Celeste said the journey to motherhood is comprised of unique twists and turns.

women were going about their daily duties and responsibilities, all the while carrying this emotional plea of hoping that they would finally be able to have the privilege of being a mother. I'd see women leave with smiles on their faces but also many who left in tears. Talk about heartbreaking!

Emotionally, IVF is extremely hard. It was for me at least, and I only did one round—some women do multiple! My emotions are all over the place in my “normal life,” so when I had to take daily injections of hormones and manipulate my body, it didn't make it any easier.

It's no secret that the IVF process is invasive, but the pain that can come with it is a new experience for sure. I'm no medical professional, so I'm sure there's a better way to describe this, but for me it felt like I was nine months pregnant! My body had blown up so much that I couldn't fit into any of my clothes. When I could walk I literally waddled from the hospital bed to the shower, and no position brought me comfort. Sitting hurt, lying down hurt, everything hurt. It was just crazy to see my body transform like that in such a short time.

Although my experience with IVF had a few unexpected setbacks,

I was blessed to have retrieved six eggs after my cycle, three fully mature and three half mature but mature enough to freeze.

Every mother's journey to motherhood is comprised of unique twists, turns and miracles, most of which remain within the knowledge of their immediate family. Because George and I have experienced seeing the realities of what many other couples face, we have seen firsthand how difficult conceiving children can be. So before you decide to ask a couple why they “don't have any kids yet,” it would be wise to think twice. Starting a family isn't as easy as “the birds and the bees” story suggests.

Whether you're a woman that goes through IVF unsuccessfully, endures the heartbreak of miscarriage, is denied an application for adoption or is facing another setback whilst trying to conceive, just remember you are not alone and you are most definitely not a failure as a woman! These setbacks and trials are more common than you think, and although they are hard to relive and share with others, your silent battles need not be without the comfort of women and couples around the world.

I'm only halfway through my chemo treatments, so I don't know yet what my verdict will be as to becoming a mother and what avenues I may need to take. What I do know is that with God, all things are possible and eternal. ■

Celebrating 175 Years of Service

By Mormon Newsroom

Women from the Relief Society in Melbourne recently celebrated the worldwide organisation's founding 175 years ago with a special service project to bring much-needed supplies to vulnerable women.

After spending several months making 198 fleece blankets and gathering materials, 110 women gathered at the Wantirna chapel to assemble care packs for SalvoCare Eastern. They produced over 100 hygiene kits, 40 maternity packs and 106 smiley hampers. A total of 100 "Days for Girls" packs were also assembled for shipment to third-world countries.

The stake Relief Society president, Sheryl Bulfin, presented the blankets and packs to Kate Williams, a youth supervisor for SalvoCare Eastern, on behalf of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Ms. Williams, who has worked with extremely high-risk, disadvantaged and homeless youth for more than 20 years, said, "It brings tears to my eyes seeing you all work so hard and so diligently today, as you have for so many years, to help and support our centres.

"You don't know how much the young people who receive these gifts

SUPPLIED



The Relief Society group produced over 100 hygiene kits, 40 maternity packs and 106 smiley hampers.

are overwhelmed to know that somebody actually cares enough to do this for them," she said.

Established in 1842, the Relief Society is the largest women's organisation in the world, and as the name



Women in Melbourne recently celebrated the founding of Relief Society 175 years ago with a special service project.

Helping Hands Conserve Coastal Dunes in Perth

By Mormon Newsroom

To conserve the coastal dunes, more than 85 people, dressed in yellow vests, planted approximately 7,000 spinifex cuttings on Trigg Beach in Perth, Western Australia, in October last year.

“This is just a phenomenal response in seeing so many assist with conservation of our dunes,” said Murray Woods, Acting Senior Environmental/Conservation Officer with the City of Stirling.

The dune planting project was undertaken by members of the Perth Australia Dianella Stake as their Mormon Helping Hands community service project in collaboration with the City of Stirling.

Mr. Woods added, “It is vital that these dunes are re-vegetated to not only provide stability against wind erosion but also to serve as habitat for wildlife and as refuge in their migration along the coastal corridor.”

With 6.5 kilometres of coastal dunes and beaches, the City of Stirling is one of the largest local government authorities in the Perth metropolitan region.

Officers and staff of the City of Stirling were on hand to prepare the spinifex cuttings, to assist Church

suggests, its ethos is to bring relief to those in need, strengthening others spiritually and temporally through ministering and service.

Sister Bulfin said providing relief to disadvantaged women in the community was the perfect way to commemorate the organisation’s 175 years of service.

“The Relief Society motto is ‘Charity Never Faileth’”, she said. “As women and followers of Jesus Christ, we

feel a great desire and joy in sharing what we have with those who really need it. The service project shows the impact we can have on our community when we work together.”

The day’s celebrations also included a delicious birthday cake and high tea, followed by a viewing of the worldwide broadcast of the general women’s session of the 187th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ■

members with effective planting techniques and to instruct everyone on safety.

The event concluded with all participants enjoying a leisurely lunch barbeque and sausage sizzle at nearby Clarko Reserve parkland off Trigg Beach foreshore. ■



More than 85 people, dressed in yellow vests, planted approximately 7,000 spinifex cuttings on Trigg Beach in Perth, Western Australia, in October last year.



MISSIONARY MOMENTS

The Church Is True

By Claudia Mitchell

I remember clearly when the prophet announced the age change for sister missionaries. I was 16 years old and visiting another ward with my family. When we heard about the announcement, my mother and I stepped out of sacrament meeting so we could search online for the official announcement. It shocked me because previously I felt that 21 was so far away and I would be well into university and dating seriously, so a mission was the last thing on my mind. But when I heard 19 was now the new age for sisters, I knew that I would serve a mission. This announcement changed everything for me. Suddenly a whole new path opened up.

The next three years I prepared to serve a mission—finishing seminary, working full-time to save money, studying at university to develop good habits and working to keep myself unspotted from the world. My father and three older brothers had all served missions, so I felt some pressure and I wanted to be certain that I was going to serve the Lord and not to impress my family.

One night as I was reading the Book of Mormon and pondering over my decision to serve, I had an epiphany—2 Nephi 16:8: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said: Here am I; send me.” This scripture spoke directly to me as if the Lord was asking me, “Who will go for us?” And I could, now, wholeheartedly reply, “Here I am. Send me.” And send me He did to the Fiji Suva Mission for 18 months to labour with the beautiful people there and make lifelong friends with the sisters who would help me through this time.

I grew up in the Church and earned the right to a testimony. I know the Church is true, and these are the words I wrote, in various ways, every day in my journal. Each day the statement “the Church is true” would vary according to how my day had gone and the experiences I had had for the day, reinforcing a fundamental truth I have held dear all of my life. It’s a simple phrase, “the Church is true,” but it held so much strength and motivation for me during this challenging but wonderful 18 months of my life.

I remember watching my first convert, Sala, enter the waters of baptism. It was as if I got a small glimpse into the love Heavenly Father has for His children. I wrote in my journal that night:

Saturday, 2nd April 2016: “I am very emotionally, spiritually, and physically drained today. One of Heavenly Father’s special daughters took one step closer to Him, and yet again *the Church is still true.*”

This phrase helped me to remember what my purpose was:

Friday, 19th August 2016: “I know that serving others is something I want to continue doing for the rest of my life. *The Church is very true today.*”

I wrote the phrase again when I felt love and concern for the welfare of others:

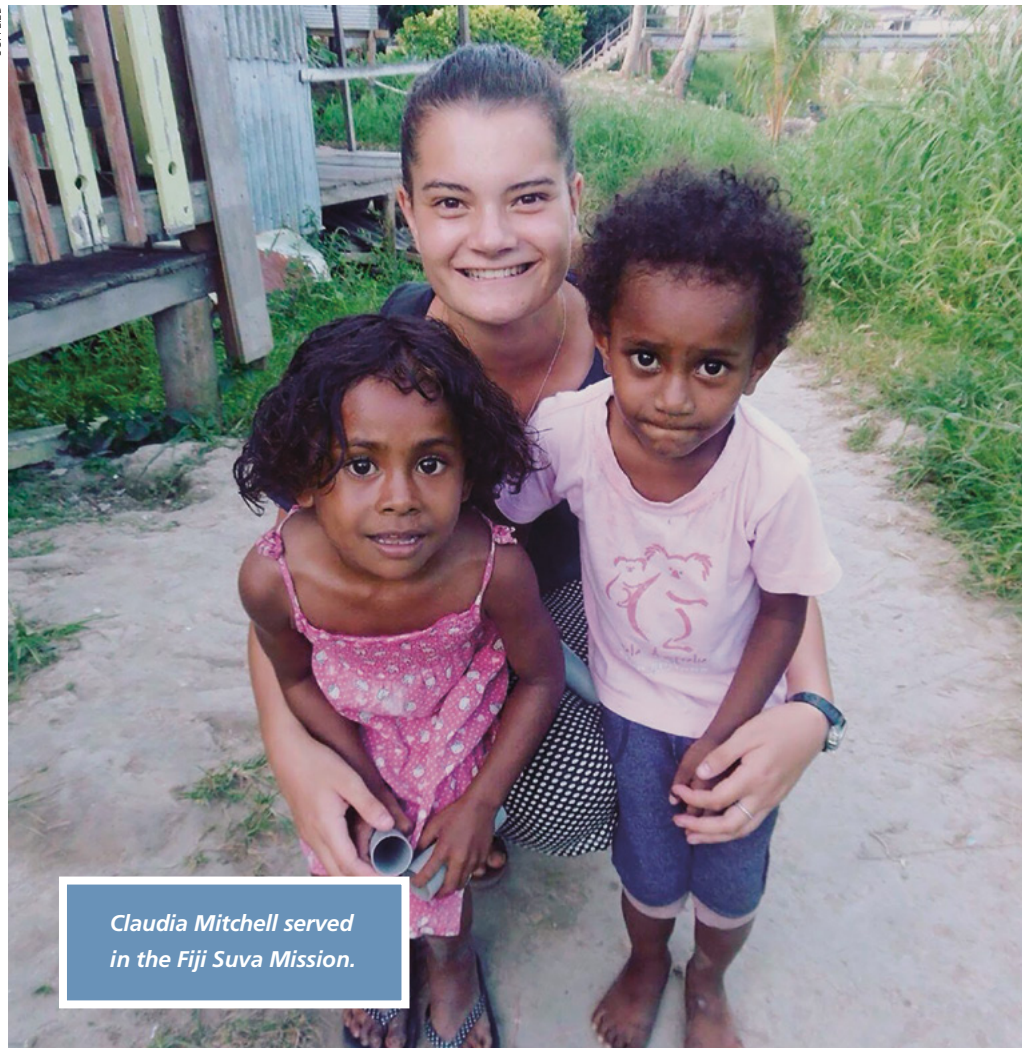
Monday, 12th September 2016: “I love my family so much. When a family does not want to take the lessons anymore it really hurts me because I want them to have an eternal family like mine. Everything will be okay because the *teachings of the Church will still be true tomorrow.*”

Again, the phrase fit so perfectly in my journal entry about growth and self-improvement:

Thursday, 15th December 2016: “It’s such a blessing getting to learn and grow each day. Even when it gets hard, I know I can look back and see my life change and hopefully the lives of others too. I can’t believe I only have 6 more months to go. I have so many things that I still want to accomplish, but I know there is *no better place to learn and grow than in the true Church.*”

In times of doubt and inadequacy, this phrase always brought me the most comfort:

Wednesday, 19th April 2017: “I wonder if I am being too hard on myself. I wonder if my service is the



Claudia Mitchell served in the Fiji Suva Mission.

best it can be. I can’t seem to connect with others lately. I just want to do well and make Him proud. Even when I don’t feel that I am good enough—*the Church will always be true.*”

Even in my last weeks of serving as a full-time missionary, this phrase I had come to love gave me the peace and comfort I needed:

Thursday, June 1st 2017: “I can’t believe my mission is coming to an end. I am excited about the new life I will be starting when I return home. I have learned so much from this experience. I love the Lord, and whether I’m here serving a mission or I am at home—*the Church will always remain true.*”

This statement is one of the fundamental parts of my testimony which I loved to declare each day and be reminded that the Church is true, Jesus is the Christ and this is His restored gospel. President Monson is the living prophet and the Book of Mormon is true.

The Church is true: that was my declaration and my comfort and it kept me going. It continues to be my declaration and my comfort and will keep me going through the days ahead. ■

Claudia Mitchell is from Auckland, New Zealand, and served in the Fiji Suva Mission from December 2015 to June 2017. She is currently in the YSA ward in Takapuna.