

# NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

## AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

### Prophets and the Blessings of Following Their Counsel

Elder 'Aisake K. Tukuafu

Area Seventy

A prophet is a man called of God and he speaks on behalf of God. His role is to reveal the will and true nature of God to all the children of men. But his divine role is to testify of Christ. Since the beginning of time, all prophets have repeatedly testified of Christ. The Lord also reveals His secrets to His prophets. Therefore, He builds His Church upon the foundation of apostles and prophets.

I always like to think about the story of the widow of Zarephath. When the prophet Elijah asked her for some water to drink, he also asked her to bring him a morsel of bread so he could eat. The widow made it known to Elijah she had only a handful of meal and a little oil left; it was all she had. It was only enough for a last meal for herself and her son and then they would die.

Elijah said she should make the cake with her last supplies as she had planned, but he asked her to feed him first and then cook for herself and her son.

Elijah then showed her the power of God; he left a miracle and a blessing when he said, “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel

of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth” (1 Kings 17:14).

“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah” (1 Kings 17:16).

This all came about because of the faith and obedience of the widow when she followed the words of Jehovah through Elijah. The Lord has commanded, “Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (Doctrine & Covenants 1:38).

One of the blessings of the Restoration in this last dispensation and in the fulness of times is that the Lord called Joseph Smith as the greatest prophet in this last dispensation. Since then, prophets continue to use the keys of the

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priesthood to guide The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) was the first prophet I met personally when he visited Tonga back in 1976. I was serving as a full-time missionary. That memory seems to me like it happened just yesterday. President Kimball looked at me straight in the eye and slowly asked me with his hoarse voice, “Do you love your companion?” My heart beat fast and I was confused. When I finally replied I said, “Yes.”



My testimony was strengthened because I knew President Kimball was a prophet of the Lord.

We are grateful for our beloved living prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. He gave four invitations to the women of the Church in the October 2018 general conference. One was to read the Book of Mormon and to finish it before the end of the year (2018). Just as Jehovah spoke to the widow of Zarephath through Elijah, the Lord again spoke through President Nelson

and said, “As you prayerfully study, I promise that the heavens will open for you. The Lord will bless you with increased inspiration and revelation.

“... And changes, even miracles, will begin to happen.”<sup>1</sup>

I testify that as we follow the living prophet, the Lord will bless us. Jesus Christ is our Saviour and our Redeemer. ■

**NOTE**

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2018, 69–70.

**LOCAL PAGES**

## “Be Smart”

By Crystal Viljoen

It’s party time in Browns Bay for 11 members of the former Torbay Ward, as they graduate from university this year. For a small ward like Torbay, 11 graduates is a huge achievement. With their variety of ages and situations, this group of graduates has reached the end of a long and challenging journey into education and self-reliance. Now they look forward to the future with exciting plans and high hopes.

“I want to be a serial entrepreneur,” Caitlin Lavelua said. “I want to start

heaps of businesses with my husband. We have three little companies going so far.”

Like many university students, Caitlin Lavelua took a while to figure out what she wanted to do. Caitlin Moller, another Torbay graduate, found her career path long after she had begun her studies. “When people asked me what I wanted to do with my degree I would say, ‘I don’t know, be a mother.’ Eventually someone at church pointed out I had an interesting and engaging teaching style, so I thought maybe I could make a career out of it.”

Hannah Rapata graduated with a bachelor of science degree despite her



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learning disability. “I have a hearing impairment,” she said, “which made things extra tough, so getting through my degree was a real accomplishment.”

Though Hannah’s challenges made things hard, she received a lot of support from the university. “They’ve got a lot of disability support,” she said. “They made sure I had all my notes written up for me, and in my tests I got extra time.” Hannah plans to continue on to a master’s degree, she said: “I think studying has helped me to grow spiritually in terms of faith,

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prayer and a testimony of the grace of God. Heavenly Father knows our weaknesses and He will make up for them 100 percent and more if we have the faith to try.”

As well as support for learning difficulties, Massey University offers support and counselling for anxiety and other mental health challenges.

Ingela Eiberg, a self-proclaimed perfectionist, developed anxiety as she neared the end of her degree. “I really love studying and learning but I am a perfectionist and developed anxiety,” she said. “With the help of counselling, I was able to get through and graduate.” She now helps others to get help

for their anxiety, which is very common among university students with the pressure of exams and assignments.

Ingela is 52 and studied alongside her son Reuben completing the same accounting degree. “He liked my notes,” she laughed. “I felt prompted to go back to school and was amazed to find that my brain still worked. You’ll be surprised how your advanced age can actually make you better off than the younger students as you have more life experience.”

Though all 11 reached graduation at the same time, their individual journeys were unique. Caitlin Lavelua worked full time while she studied.

Ingela studied part time while her son Reuben studied full time. Calli Bates received her mission call, while Cam Hulme’s first child was delivered. There were tears, long nights and fervent prayers, and none said that the journey was easy or straightforward, but they all shared one sentiment: just do it. Getting started is the hardest part, but if you have faith and jump in, God will help you find your way.

Congratulations to Hannah Rapata, Teresa Amende, Ingela Eiberg, Reuben Eiberg, Sarah Pemberton, Caitlin Lavelua, Cam Hulme, Caitlin Moller, Fred Folu, Calli Bates and Moezhelle Saulala. ■

# Adoption: A Sacred Journey to Parenthood

Tracy Marshall and Marilee Matenga

The sacred calling of parenthood is not always straightforward. Many righteous men and women struggle with infertility and the trials that go with not being able to conceive. The unknowns of adoption can be barriers to those looking for answers to their prayers. Hoping to shed some light on the process, Marilee Matenga and Tracy Marshall answer questions on the ups and downs of becoming parents through adoption.

## What brought you to the decision to adopt?

**Marilee:** IVF was unsuccessful for us. Knowing that you cannot physically have children hit me hard. I grew up in a big family and always wanted to have lots of children. Not once did I think that I would have any difficulty, let alone not be able to have any at all—especially as my siblings had no problem having children.

Adoption was the only option left. I was ready to jump into it as soon as possible but my husband, Kelvin, needed a lot of process time. This was mainly because he is a very



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cautious person and adoption is a huge unknown. After much prayer, fasting and patience, waiting for my husband to be ready, it was finally time to take the plunge.

**Tracy:** In the earlier years of our married life, we had no reason to adopt. We believed we would have



our own children, and medically, professionals couldn't tell us why we were unable to conceive. There were so many unanswered questions and so much heartache. Finally, an answer from the Lord came. It was not what

we wanted but what we needed to soften our hearts and prepare us for what was to come.

My cousin in the UK had lost her four children to the state. We had not been open to adoption before, but these children were family and they needed a home; they needed to be loved. *All* children deserve a loving home! And there it was, the softening of the heart that we needed. Unfortunately, it was not meant to be this time, as the opportunity closed before us only two months after it had opened. I had opened my heart fully and was vulnerable and it seemed that the door had been slammed in our faces. I poured out my heart to the Lord and asked Him what He would have me do now because I was ready to shut my heart up again and close the door on ever being a mother here on earth. After 15 years of wanting and waiting for our turn, it had come to this moment.

Just in time, a phone call came a few hours later, after my pleading prayer. It was my sister. She had been in conversations with a close friend whose daughter was pregnant and was making the hardest decision of her life, to adopt out her child. Six months later, we became parents to the most gorgeous baby girl. I know the Lord's hand was in all the details over those 15 years of our married life.

He knew exactly how things needed to work and He had never forgotten us; He was preparing us.

### **What were the hardest moments and how did you get through them?**

**Marliee:** The waiting was the hardest. Even though our son Talmage came to us only eight months after submitting our adoption profile, it felt like an eternity!

Even harder than that was the waiting between meeting Talmage and taking him home—15 days later.

So many things go through your mind during these waiting periods: Will anyone pick us? Will they change their mind? How long is this going to take? We got through it by immersing ourselves in our work, our callings and service. I took my nephews and nieces out to keep busy.


**Tracy:** One of the hardest moments was when we lost all contact



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same words that we had been using in our fasts and prayers. One of the hardest moments had turned into one of the sweetest. Fear had diminished and hope was restored.

### **What were the most wonderful moments?**

**Marilee:** Meeting Talmage for the first time. His birth mother had wanted to meet us, so she and some of her family came to see us and they brought Talmage with them. We were not expecting her to bring him, so we were very pleasantly surprised. I tried hard to not look at him too much because I didn't want to get my hopes up. He was so handsome, and his big brown eyes melted my heart. He needed to be fed during our visit and she asked if I wanted to give him his bottle, which of course I did. I fed him as we spoke and later found out that, other than his birth mother and her mum, Talmage normally would not go to anyone without a big fuss. He was eight weeks old at the time. For his birth mother and me, this was a defining moment.

Another wonderful moment was the day we were sealed as a family in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple. The feelings of joy we felt are indescribable.

**Tracy:** There are many, but I will mention only one. Meeting the birth mother for the first time and seeing

with the birth mother during the pregnancy. Out of respect and love for her, we honoured her request for no contact. Not a day would go by that we didn't worry. We constantly feared that she would change her mind. We had no way of knowing how she was doing emotionally and what she was thinking. The only thing we could do was to fast and pray on a regular basis, that the birth mother would be at peace with the decision she had

made. Our prayers seemed to have the same words every time, that she would "feel peace in her decision."

After months of no contact, we finally received a message from the birth mother. It was a short message, but it was all we needed to hear to renew our hope and know that the Lord was still very much a part of this journey. Her words to us were: "I am at peace with the decision I have made, . . . all is going well". The exact

how amazing she was. Instantly we loved her, and we were so blown away by the strength and maturity she showed with the remarkable decision she had made for her unborn child. Choosing to adopt out your child, when you know you cannot give them what they need, is such a selfless act of pure love. We still have so much love and admiration for her—we always will.

**If you could send your past self a message, what would it be?**

**Marilee:** Honestly, I believe that the experiences I have had so far at my age have been something I have needed at the time. Perhaps I would simply tell myself to live life!

**Tracy:** “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways

acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). I spent too many days and nights worrying and fretting over things that I didn’t have but yearned for, instead of being present in the moment and in the season of life I was in. I would tell myself to see my time serving in the Church as valuable preparation for when I did become a mother. I resented too many things. The Lord prepares His children to receive each blessing that we are entitled to. However, it’s done in His time and according to His will, not ours.

**Did you feel the Lord’s hand in your journey?**

**Marilee:** Most definitely! Very strong and at every step. The Lord has blessed us so abundantly! I know without a doubt that Talmage is meant to be with us. I know that the Lord led

his birth mother to us and blessed and helped her in her decisions, and she will tell you the same. She is a very special person to us. We know that the Lord’s hand was in every stage of this process and feel very humbled and blessed to be a part of it.

**Tracy:** Absolutely! God was in every part of our adoption journey. However, I didn’t always see it or acknowledge it. I am grateful that I kept a journal because I have been able to look back over this time and see how the Lord has comforted me, blessed me, and strengthened me beyond my own abilities. He put the right pieces of our adoption puzzle in place. I know my time to become a mother was foreordained and that getting me to the moment I would hold my baby for the first time wasn’t just a nine-month journey. ■

## Two Latter-day Saints Receive ‘Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit’ Recognition

### Newsroom

Two members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were recently awarded “Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit” recognition, part of the Queen’s New Zealand State Honours New Year’s list.

Kerry Louise Owen and Laurie Tamati Ngarue Sadler (Laurie Wharemate-Keung) were recognised for their services to children.

Owen founded the charity Feed the Need in 2012 to provide lunches

to disadvantaged school children. Wharemate-Keung is the general manager of the charity.

The New Zealand Order of Merit was instituted in 1996, and awards are presented for meritorious service to the



Crown or the nation to those who have become distinguished in their particular field of endeavour. All New Zealand State Honours are instituted under a Royal Warrant signed by Queen Elizabeth II.

Since founding Feed the Need, Owen has been instrumental in delivering hot fresh lunches to schools during the winter months. In 2017 the charity delivered more than 90,000 meals.

Feed the Need has also initiated a work placement programme providing students with paid employment, which has helped these youth gain confidence and transferable skills.

Owen and Wharemate-Keung are now introducing a new approach to the organisation, introducing a food pantry program to targeted schools. The program includes emergency packs and weekend packs, with the intent to also supply whanau packs and hygiene kits.

Wharemate-Keung has helped develop the charity's hot lunches to children program and the youth work placement initiative. The charity provides around 1,500 daily meals to children in two Otago and five Manurewa schools during winter, with further expansion in progress. ■

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Our local pages section is produced by members in our own area under the guidance of our Area Presidency so that it can address the needs and experiences of members where we live. The inclusion of the local pages in each issue depends on the availability of local content. We are invited to contribute our faith-promoting thoughts and experiences by contacting our editor:

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