

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

A Friend for All Seasons

By Elder Joni L. Koch

Second Counselor, Africa Southeast Area Presidency



Elder Joni L. Koch

“We all—at some point—will come to understand that we can count only on a handful of people, but ultimately, exclusively on our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ—for He is the only friend who can free us from the pains caused by our greatest fears: death and the separation from our loved ones.”

During this Easter season—as we ponder the Savior: His life, sacrifice and resurrection—His words found in John 15:13 seem to capture a special meaning: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

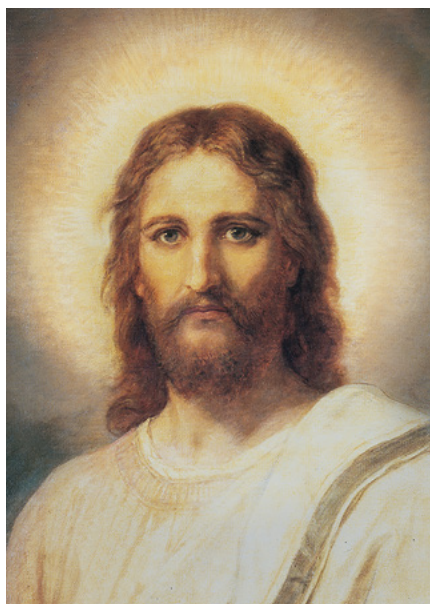
Have you ever thought about how many good friends you actually have?

Or who is your very best friend?

Some months ago, I was able to get in touch again, through a video conference, with one who used to be a very good friend in the past—but with whom I had no contact for nearly two decades. He had made some decisions in his life which caused many of his “good” friends, including myself, to decide not to be close to him anymore. During this video conference we were trying to catch up for nearly 20 missing years of our lives. He then called his younger son, who appeared in front of the screen smiling, and he

said pointing at me: “Son, I want you to meet your dad’s very best friend!” At that moment I felt a mixture of joy for learning that he still considers me his best friend—and pain for knowing that I had left him alone, perhaps when he needed me the most. We have, since then, reignited the flame of our precious friendship.

If we pay close attention, we will realize that we all have different kinds of friends: The “good times” friends, who will be around if we have something to offer. The “bad times” friends, who will suddenly appear to sympathize for some difficult situation we are going through. There are also the “circumstantial” friends, who will interact with us as long as we are working, studying or even serving together, but



disappear from our lives when we are not in close proximity any longer. Nowadays, we have the so-called “social media” friends, who will like and even comment on our pictures and posts, but perhaps will mostly remain in a shallow relationship.

While we should enjoy and treasure all types of friendships and try to be friendly to all, when dark clouds come over our lives and we feel like we cannot go through life alone this critical question comes:

Who can I really count on?

We all—at some point—will come to understand that we can count only on a handful of people, but ultimately, exclusively on our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ—for He is the only friend who can free us from the pains caused by our greatest fears: death and the separation from our loved ones.

“For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39)

Through His Atonement and Resurrection, we have the certainty of receiving immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:21–22) and the possibility of living with our loved ones for eternity by living His gospel and receiving His temple ordinances.



How can we show deep appreciation to the Lord for his perfect friendship?

He gives the answer in John 15:14:

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

In our area plan we are directed to increase our faith (therefore our friendship) in Jesus Christ by:

- Improving Sabbath day observance;
- Worthily having a temple recommend and participating in temple work; and

- Reading and pondering the Book of Mormon daily.

May we decide to do these things that the Lord has commanded us—all of which will strengthen our faith in and friendship with the Savior. We then will learn that He has been—and will continue to be—our best friend in every season of our lives. ■

Joni L. Koch was sustained as a General Authority Seventy in April 2017. He is married to Liliane Michele Ludwig; they are the parents of two children.

LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADER MESSAGE

Developing Spiritually

By Elder Khumbulani D. Mdletshe
Area Seventy

“Developing spiritually should be a lifetime quest for all of us who constantly strive to have to constant meaningful relationship with our Heavenly Father.”

In an October 1985 talk, President Dallin H. Oaks reminded us that faithful members of the Church have a distinctive way of looking at life. He said that they view life in terms



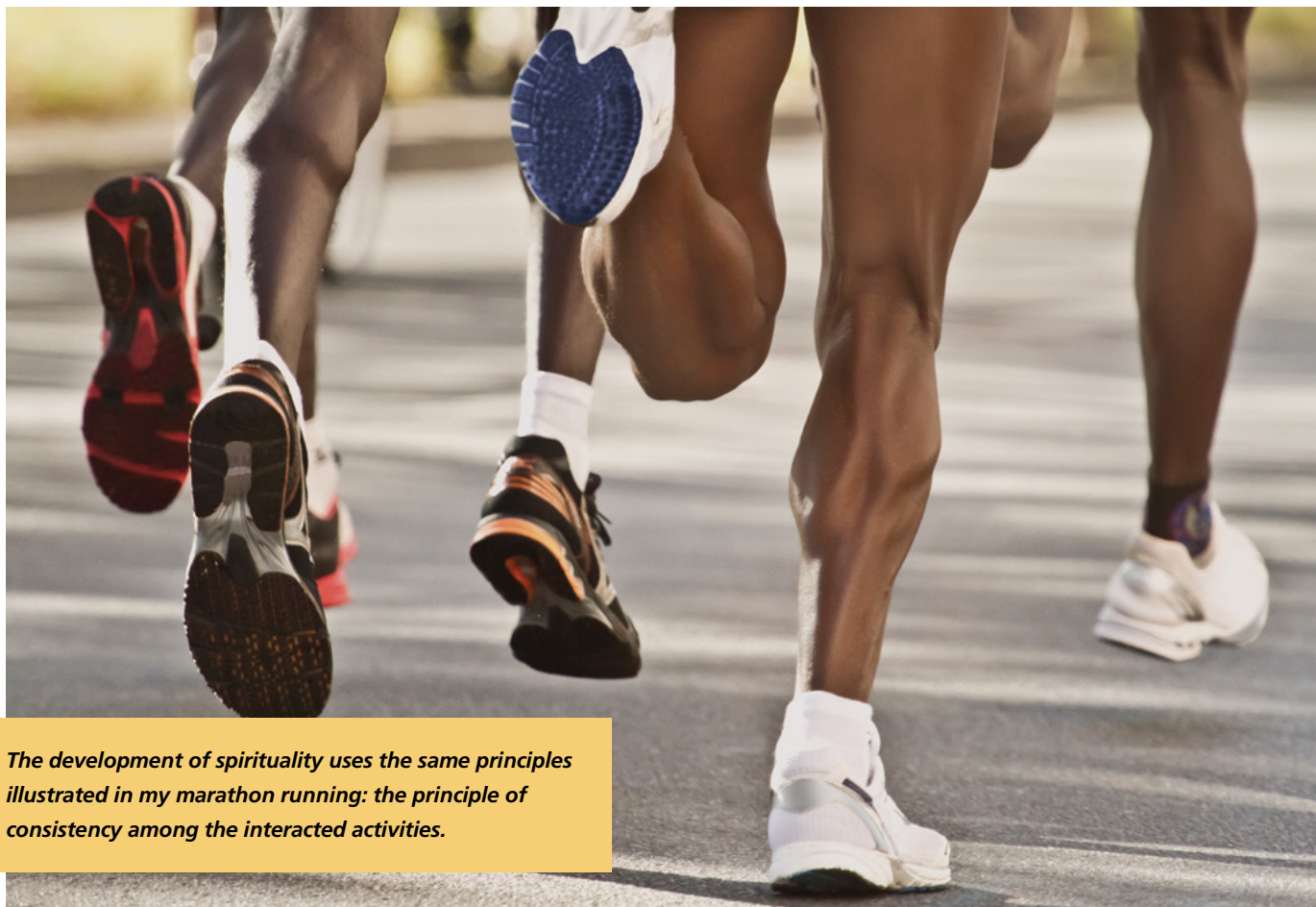
Elder
Khumbulani D.
Mdletshe

of eternity.¹ This is because they feel closer to our Heavenly Father and are always guided by the Spirit. This way of viewing life results from spiritual growth achieved through hard work over a long time. I would like to demonstrate the principles of developing spirituality by sharing what I learned from a marathon training schedule.

In 2002 I decided to run marathons. Since that time, I have run more than fifty marathons (42.2 kilometers) and ultra-marathons (beyond 42.2 km). The longest was the Comrades Marathon (90 km). Over time, I learned that consistency in my training makes a difference.

Nine weeks prior to the race day, I follow the following weekly schedule: Monday a 10 km run at the marathon pace (6 minutes per km). Tuesday is speed training, made up of an 8 km in less than 40 minutes. Wednesday is hill work. I start with a 2 km warm up, followed by running up and down a 500-meter hill. Thursday is an easy 10 km run, much slower than the Monday 10 km, finishing at 1 hour 10 minutes. Friday is another easy run or catching up on any training missed during the week. Saturday is a slow run of two or three hours, aimed at building endurance. Sunday is a rest day—an important element of training. I also remember to keep the Sabbath day holy, for if I obey with exactness, I am guaranteed of completing any marathon within an allocated time. I use the same schedule for both standard marathons and ultras.

These daily and weekly activities work together. If one of them is missed, my run will be affected. For example, the speed work helps me finish within the allocated time, but if I don't do my long runs on Saturday,



The development of spirituality uses the same principles illustrated in my marathon running: the principle of consistency among the interacted activities.

I would not have the needed endurance. The speed might be there, but I won't get there. If hill training isn't done, I won't finish in time because I would walk hills instead of running.

SPIRITUAL MARATHON

The development of spirituality uses the same principles illustrated in my marathon running: the principle of consistency among the interacted activities. The Lord has an established

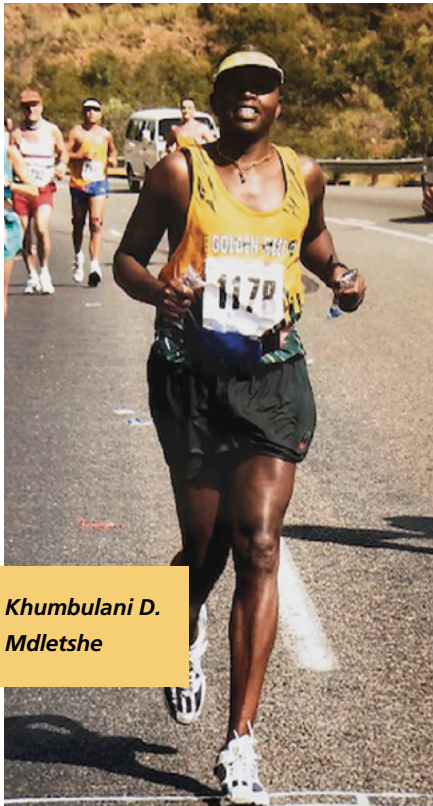
pattern for spiritual development. I have had times in my life when I have felt much closer to Heavenly Father than at other times. When I have been closer to the Lord it is because I did certain things with consistency. As I study the lives of Jesus Christ and our Church leaders, I notice common elements in their daily practices that brought spiritual growth in them.

Purposeful attendance at sacrament meeting: The sacrament brings

us closer to the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It reminds us of who Christ is and our dependency on Him. It is no wonder that a lot of emphasis has been put on this subject by Church leaders recently.

Daily scripture study: Helps us to hear the voice of the Lord encouraging us to make righteous choices.

Daily prayer: Teaches us to be humble as we kneel to thank and ask the Lord. This dependency becomes



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strong as our spirituality continues to grow.

Acts of service: King Benjamin, a Book of Mormon prophet, taught, “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”² Every adult member of the Church has plenty of opportunities to provide service.

The work of ministering: Gives every member an opportunity to serve. Being a part of a family presents us with real chances of learning how to serve. Development of spirituality aligns itself with the amount of knowledge one possesses.

Formalized gospel study: Assists us in learning in a structured way. For those who are between the ages 14 and 30, I would include participation in seminary and institute classes. In those classes one hears testimonies of peers and is called to teach—which provides added strength.

President Dallin H. Oaks concurs with some elements identified above when he said, “We know the principal sources of spiritual food: prayer, studying the scriptures, attending inspirational meetings, singing the hymns of Zion, serving in our callings, fasting, partaking of the sacrament, and making other covenants.”³

Like my marathon training schedule which is designed to help me complete a marathon, these interrelated spiritually-based activities help one to develop spirituality. To achieve the desired results, consistency is required. It takes time to develop spirituality. President Howard W. Hunter (1907–1995) observed, “Developing spirituality and attuning ourselves to the highest influence of godliness is

not an easy matter. It takes time and frequently involves a struggle. It will not happen by chance, but it is only accomplished through deliberate effort and by calling upon God and keeping His commandments.”⁴

Developing spiritually should be a lifetime quest for all of us who constantly strive to have a meaningful relationship with our Heavenly Father. ■

Khumbulani Mdletshe was named an Area Seventy in April 2014. He is married to Cynthia Ntombifuthi Hlongwane; they are the parents of four children. Elder and Sister Mdletshe reside in Roodepoort, South Africa.

NOTES

1. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Spirituality,” *Ensign*, November 1985, 61–63.
2. Mosiah 2:17.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Nourishing the Spirit,” *Ensign*, December 1998, p. 7.
4. Howard W. Hunter, “Developing Spirituality,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 25.

“CHOOSE A MEMORABLE SABBATH” SERIES

How I Learned to Honour the Sabbath Day

By Jennifer Ann Vogt

“I was challenged on how to stay true to my Sabbath day convictions without causing grief and discord within my family.”

I grew up in a Protestant home and so I knew that the Sabbath was a holy day but I had not been

taught—nor did I ever enquire—what the term ‘holy’ really meant. I never went to public entertainment or took part in public activities on the Sabbath, perhaps mainly because I went to a Christian boarding school for seven years and had grown up in

South Africa, where at that time, all shops and public forms of entertainment were closed on the Sabbath. So, I didn't have to make a choice about those things.

Later in my life, the missionaries came and shared the plan of salvation with me. I received a testimony of the truth and was so thrilled at what I was learning that from that day forward I had no problem in my conviction to keep the Sabbath day holy—but the practice of doing so was not always easy.

I was married at the time I began meeting with the missionaries and my husband did not share my enthusiasm for the Church—yet he was a good man with high principles and a Lutheran background. But I was challenged on how to stay true to my Sabbath day convictions without causing grief and discord within my family. During this “wilderness” time for me I received important advice that my family was most important and that I should do whatever I could to keep us together.

Baptism was withheld from me and so I did not have the constant companion of the Holy Spirit to guide me. But I loved my family and so I embarked on a course to stay true to honouring the Sabbath whenever possible and where I could, yet allowing myself to join in my husband's social activities if he planned these

It has been a journey, but I have learned that, truly, the Sabbath can be a delight.

on the Sabbath—without complaint. These activities were mostly contained within our circle of friends and sometimes they involved business or public functions.

Even after South Africa no longer adhered to keeping the Sabbath day holy, I chose never to fill my car with fuel or purchase household or personal goods on the Sabbath, something that was encouraged by my husband. An activity that my husband did enjoy was watching Formula One motor racing on TV on a Sunday afternoon and he wanted me to share his interest, which I did. Our home was generally peaceful on the Sabbath and we both liked to listen to good classical music and which I intermingled with sacred music. I also found, when it was appropriate to my conditions, to keep my Sunday dress on. This helped me mentally choose fitting activities and behaviour while staying in harmony with my family circumstances.

I had challenges at first in going to church and chose to attend only sacrament meeting and Sunday School—so as not to be away from home for too long. On Saturdays I always prepared a good Sunday meal and

any animosity from my husband at my Sunday absence from home was soon forgotten. This was the pattern of my life for 22 years and there was in the end a greater harmony and acceptance of my limited Sabbath day values, but fully integrated in our lifestyle. Eventually, heartened by my husband's changing attitude, my journey in the Church culminated in my baptism. Now I could have the companion of the Spirit to help guide me in the future.

I now felt freer to follow my feelings for keeping the Sabbath holy—this time with the Holy Spirit's promptings. I also started attending full Sunday church activity without problems. I allowed myself to indulge in the driving urgency to search out my family ancestors and in so doing stimulated my husband's interest by asking his mother to record memories and pictures she had of her family. She produced, as a legacy, a beautiful handwritten book with photos. This became a motivating activity on Sundays in which my husband showed interest. (The digital age was not so advanced as it is today, so it was a very time-consuming activity.) This led to writing many letters to family members and institutions in other countries searching for information—and the Sabbath day allowed me time to do this, although I had to temper my enthusiasm so that it did

not dominate my entire Sunday to the exclusion of family time.

Sometimes Sabbath observance was difficult as my husband in his work did a lot of travelling outside the country and liked to have me with him. If there was a church in any of the towns we visited, and nothing was planned, he was always agreeable to my attending sacrament meeting, but at the same time I never curtailed his plans for a social get-together if he

chose to do so. Overall, the Sabbath became a firm family unity day for us.

Now, I am widowed, but sealed in the temple to my husband, and I still find the Sabbath a delight. Not only do I enjoy full Sunday church activity, but I relish the thought of doing family history research in this new digital age and preparing names for temple ordinances. I am fascinated in getting to know my ancestors by researching and writing their stories and sharing copies

with extended family members. I love the couple of quiet hours of morning scripture study uninterrupted by any other demands. I relish an hour or so of rest, listening to a mix of gentle light classical and sacred music. And, on some Sabbath days I connect with long-distant family members by phone, email, or digitally.

It has been a journey, but I have learned that, truly, the Sabbath can be a delight. ■



LOCAL PAGES

Church Growth in Angola Reaches Important Milestone

By Douglas T. Parrish

Area Communications Director, Africa Southeast Area

December 2, 2018 was an important milestone date for members of the Church in Angola when the Luanda Angola Stake was organized—the very first stake in that country. Elder Joni L. Koch, General Authority Seventy and Second Counselor in the Africa Southeast Area Presidency, presided at this unprecedented stake conference, and—along with Elder Artur J. Miranda, Area Seventy—conducted the business of organizing the new stake and the new stake presidency.

President Isidro Luís Narciso Baptista was called as stake president, with President Sebastião Dombaxe Quiame as first counselor, and President Amândio de Alméida Feijó as second counselor. All three of these brothers have served in various Church leadership capacities in the years leading up to the creation of the new stake.

The history of the Church in Angola has been a story of struggle, optimism, and tremendous blessings.

In 1992—at the time that the Church became officially recognized by the Angolan government—the country was still being torn apart by civil war. Many Angolans were fleeing to European countries to escape the tragedy. Some

of those became acquainted with and joined the Church. Over time, stirrings were being felt by those displaced members and plans being laid to return to their homeland in Angola.

By 1996, the first branch of the Church was organized in Luanda, with 86 people in attendance at the conference—25 of which were Church members. Many of the early members and leaders were those who were converted and trained up in European units while in exile. An example is Vuamina Tshaka Mbenza, who had been baptized and who had received the Melchizedek Priesthood in France. He was called as the first Luanda Branch President.

Unfortunately, further outbreaks of civil war prevented contact between the Area Presidency—operating from the area offices, which at that time were in London—and the members of the Church in Angola for nearly two years. And for several years afterward, there was sporadic communication with the Saints in Angola.

In 2005, the Mozambique Maputo Mission was organized and included the Portuguese-speaking countries of Mozambique and Angola. Three

years later, the first young missionaries, Elders Bell, Tarwater, Muocha, and Estevão were assigned from Mozambique to serve in Angola. These missionaries noted the strength of Church members and leaders. The missionaries' early investigators were nearly all from member referrals.

In 2008, the Cassequel Branch was created by dividing the Luanda Branch, and Emílio Joaquim Albuquerque Barroso was called as branch president. By the next year, the Cassequel Branch began holding Sunday services in a new rented meetinghouse in Luanda.

A year later, Artur J. Miranda was called as a counsellor in the Mozambique Maputo mission presidency to serve exclusively in Angola, where he had moved with his family from Portugal. (Today, Elder Artur J. Miranda serves as an Area Seventy and assisted Elder Joni L. Koch in conducting the business of organizing the Luanda Angola Stake.)

On 20 October 2010, at 6h30, as reported in the Church News, a small group of Church leaders and members gathered at the base of a large, several-hundred-year-old baobab tree on a quiet hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean to the west, with the capital city of Luanda to the north, where Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve formally dedicated Angola for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



Left to right: Elder Joni L. Koch, Second Counselor, Africa Southeast Area Presidency; President Sebastião Dombaxe Quaime, First Counselor, Luanda Angola Stake Presidency; President Isidro Luís Narciso Baptista, President, Luanda Angola Stake; President Amândio de Almeida Feijó, Second Counselor, Luanda Angola Stake Presidency; Elder Artur J. Miranda, Area Seventy; President Denelson Silva, President Angola Luanda Mission

While offering the dedicatory prayer in Portuguese, Elder Christofferson called to mind the two and a half centuries of slave trade and the 25-year-old civil war that had ended just a decade beforehand. He prayed that the suffering and conflicts of the past would have an end and that the yoke of poverty and ignorance would be removed. Recalling Angola's long tradition of religious freedom, Elder Christofferson prayed that religious liberty would endure and become a foundation for future strength and

stability as the gospel is preached without hinderance and that the kingdom of God would go forth to bless individuals, families, and the entire country. He further invoked a blessing on government leaders that they would seek to serve the people and he further prayed that persons of ability and integrity would be drawn into public service.

Six months later, the Luanda Angola District was organized, with Artur J. Miranda as district president, Isidro Luis Narciso Baptista as first counselor, and Kussy Suku Machado

Setas as second counselor. (Today, Brother Baptista serves as stake president in the newly-formed Luanda Angola Stake.)

In July 2013, the Angola Luanda Mission was organized, with Danny L. Merrill as the first mission president, and separated from the Maputo Mozambique Mission. At that time, the mission included the Luanda Angola District, with five branches—plus three additional mission branches.

At the April 2017 General Conference of the Church, Elder Artur J. Miranda was sustained as the first Area Seventy from Angola.

The Church continues to grow and flourish in Angola and the organization of the Luanda Angola Stake is a testament to the courage of Church members, leaders, and missionaries who have shared—and continue to share—the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ with so many Angolans. As prophesized by Daniel—and recorded in the Old Testament, Daniel chapter 2, verse 44—“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.” The kingdom of God will surely stand ‘for ever’ in the beautiful country—and the hearts of the beautiful people—of Angola. ■