

AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

Fast and Testimony Meetings

Elder Edward Dube

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I love fast and testimony meetings! February 5, 1984—my first experience attending The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a dramatic turning point in my life. I felt the Spirit and did not even recognize it, because I did not know the Spirit. The Savior speaking to his disciples about this precious gift of a member of the Godhead said, “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you” (John 14:17). The Lord

in his tender mercies reached out to me through President Allen and the two other members who bore pure, heartfelt testimonies about the Savior Jesus Christ and the Book of Mormon. I felt the still, small voice assuring me that I was in good company and those people were my brothers and sisters regardless of our diversity. The feeling of being in a servant relationship, which almost took me out of the chapel, vanished. I made up my mind that day, that this was the church I wanted to belong to.

Following that initial fast and testimony meeting experience, I looked forward to each subsequent fast and testimony meeting. I would fast and take the opportunity to bear my testimony. Since English is my second language, I had difficulties expressing myself during that period of my life. Therefore, I would write my testimony on a piece of paper and read it. After a few months of writing and reading my testimony, my branch president

called me into his office and said that a testimony is a spiritual witness given by the Holy Ghost. He admonished me to prepare myself spiritually and to listen to the impressions I received. He asked that I be prepared to share those impressions rather than writing down my testimony as a talk. He reminded me of my first day at church when I stood and shared my testimony. He encouraged me to have faith and bear my testimony from the heart without written notes.

I accepted this challenging invitation. What I did not say to my branch president was how difficult it was for me to compose sentences, let alone express myself in the English language.

At the fast and testimony meeting following the counsel from my branch president, I stood up and walked to the pulpit. I stood at the pulpit without saying anything for what I thought was a full minute. I couldn't remember the words I had memorized. Since I was told not to read my testimony, I wrote it down and spent the whole week committing it to memory. Finally, when I could speak, I spoke in a haphazard way. The words were meaningless in my own mind. The congregation just looked at me in a very strange way. I felt terrible.



“Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you” (Doctrine & Covenants 62:3).

It took me a few months to gain enough confidence to be able to bear my testimony again. After my unfortunate experience, I resolved not to bear my testimony. I did not want to embarrass myself. I would sit and listen to others sharing their testimonies. I watched and listened to each brother and sister carefully. I felt their spiritual witness of the Savior Jesus Christ, the reality of the first vision, and that Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to the boy Joseph. I was inspired by each affirmation that the Book of Mormon teaches and testifies of Jesus Christ and that it is indeed another testament of Christ.

On each succeeding fast and testimony meeting, my motivation welled up from a new and more compelling source. My soul was hungry for spiritual nourishment. I was like a starving man. I couldn't get enough. The sincere expression and the words were mellow and soothing to me—more than that, they rang true. Words cannot express my feelings. It was as if I had experienced such a feeling of ecstasy somewhere before in a dim past. I felt the Lord's love for me and a desire to want to be better.

I fought the urge to share my testimony each fast and testimony meeting. Then one Sunday as the meeting was about to end, I couldn't hold back. I stood where I was and declared my own witness of the Savior. I declared "the things which [I] have heard, and verily believe, and know to be true" (Doctrine & Covenants 80:4). I knew

then as I now know, that bearing a testimony is a blessing not only to me, but to those who are touched by it. A year after the Church was organized in these latter days, the prophet Joseph Smith met several elders returning from Independence on the bank of the Missouri River. Joseph received this revelation regarding the importance of bearing one's testimony: "Nevertheless, ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels

to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you" (Doctrine & Covenants 62:3).

Since that Sunday, whenever I have an opportunity, I bear testimony of the Savior and His Atonement. I bear testimony of how the Book of Mormon has changed my life through its prophecies and teachings. I felt then, just as I do today; peace, comfort and a consistent desire to change for the better. I feel compelled to share my testimony as a service to others. ■

CHURCH HISTORY COLUMN

Temples

By Elder McCullough and Sister Christensen

11 January 2004 was a great day for all of Africa West. The dedication of the Accra Ghana Temple brought the important saving ordinances within reach of thousands of Church members in this area. Prior to this time only a few members had been able to attend a temple, either in South Africa or Europe.

The Saints in Ivory Coast were thrilled to have a temple within driving distance to their homeland. Three buses full of saints made the long drive to participate in the temple dedication as well as the cultural celebration that preceded. There was much joy and tears were shed as they witnessed a prophet of the Lord dedicate the beautiful edifice unto the Lord.

Over the years, the Ivorian Saints have been actively engaged in the family history work that culminates when members take their own family names to the temple. In 2013, it was reported in the Church News that "three of the five Cote d'Ivoire stakes are among the top 25 in the Church in the percentage of adults who submitted family names for temple ordinances during 2012. Of all stakes in the Church, the Cocody Stake has the highest percentage of adults who have, at one time or another, submitted names for temple work."¹

What has led to this intense effort in Ivory Coast?

There is not one specific answer, but perhaps a combination of several factors.

The Akan is the major cultural group of the Ivory Coast. Deep reverence for one's ancestors is an

important part of this culture. There is a belief that the dead are looking after the living. When Latter-day Saints learn of the doctrine of the teaching of the gospel in the next life and the vicarious work that takes place in the temples for deceased ancestors, there is an immediate interest.

Priesthood leaders have been instrumental in encouraging the Ivorian saints. In preparation for their first visit to the Accra Temple, each member was asked to bring a gift to the new temple. The members brought the gift of family names. For all subsequent trips, members have been encouraged to continue this tradition.

It can be very challenging to identify one's family names. Written records are scarce. People often live away from their ancestral villages. But members in the Ivory Coast have not let these challenges deter them. Prayer and fasting have been a part of this work. Visits have been made to meet with extended family, especially the older generation. Sometimes this has involved travelling into neighboring countries. The oral genealogies have been written down.

In the earliest days, there was only one computer that was available. Pedigree charts were written on paper and Personal Ancestral File was the software used. Senior couples came to serve as family history missionaries and entered the information into PAF. Over time, more computers have become available, wards and stakes have trained family history



Rendering of the exterior of the Abidjan Ivory Coast Temple

consultants, and family history centers have been established.

5 April 2015, President Thomas S. Monson announced in General Conference that a temple would be built in Ivory Coast. Due to the difference in time, most of the members in Ivory Coast did not hear the announcement live, but heard mainly by word of mouth. Large groups gathered in meeting houses later to view the rebroadcast. They patiently waited to hear the “Ivory Coast” name. There was great emotion when they heard the announcement. Brother Mathieu Brou Baah, a family history consultant exclaimed to all around him, “We got our temple!” There was great joy seeing an answer to years of fervent prayers.

Preparations are now under way for the opening of the Abidjan Ivory Coast Temple. Leaders are teaching the importance of the members being spiritual self-reliant. Firesides and

temple preparation classes are being held. In November 2018, the saints gathered next to the Cocody Stake Center in Abidjan and witnessed the groundbreaking ceremony under the direction of Elder Neil L. Andersen. The members are excited to have a House of the Lord in their midst. There is great optimism that it will have a long-lasting and powerful effect upon the people of the Church as well as the nation as a whole.

We have been counseled to record important events in our lives, such as the announcement and dedication of a temple. Keeping a personal journal gives you the opportunity to reflect on those special occasions and see the hand of the Lord in your life and the lives of those around you. It also passes on to your posterity a wonderful spiritual legacy of faith. ■

NOTE

1. R. Scott Lloyd “Elder Cook Addresses Members and Investigators in Ivory Coast,” *Liahona* or *Ensign*, July 2013, 76–77.

MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Spiritual Experience Increases Testimony

Brother Uwa Joseph

Nigeria Enugu Mission, Nwaniba 2nd Ward, Uyo Nigeria Stake, Nigeria

On this faithful day, Saturday 14 November, 2015 while serving at Lugbe as a full-time missionary, my first interview as a zone leader was with a baptismal candidate named Brother Amada, when I interviewed this young gentle man, I felt the spirit of the Lord and was really touched with the testimony of this young man about the message of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in his own words he said, “Among all the missionary lesson pamphlets that has been taught and given to me, the one I so much love and cherish is the message of the Restoration of

the gospel of Jesus Christ, and each time I read it, I get to learn new things about God and I read it frequently” he then turned to me and asked an inspired question; Do you know what makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints different from every other churches? I replied the “priesthood authority with its keys.” this young man from this moment made me to know the importance of the message of the Restoration and because of the Restoration cometh the priesthood authority.

He further said what he felt was missing in other denominations was the priesthood

and the message of the Restoration. He testified that the prophets in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the Lord’s chosen servants in this dispensation and that the living prophet of the church is indeed the chosen prophet in our day.

I do know that if we treasure and take good care of what we have, we will be richly blessed both spiritually and temporarily.

I know that President Russell M. Nelson holds all the keys in the priesthood today as it was restored to the Prophet Joseph Smith by heavenly messengers. ■

LATTER-DAY SAINT VOICES

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Brother Iheanacho Charles Ekwonye

Ward 2, Umuahia Stake, Nigeria

“Teacher! teacher! Please run now they are coming after you,” the student in a black hijab shouted at me. I couldn’t figure out why she said that. I was serving as a teacher in a village in the northern part of the country as a corper in the compulsory national youth service scheme.

Again, the warning sounded and this time, all the students in the class ran away leaving me behind. As I came out of the classroom, I saw large group of people gruesomely hacking some of my colleagues down. “What in the world is this?” I asked only to discover that I was asking the empty walls and I immediately

took to my heels as the irate mobs saw me and started running towards my direction. As I ran and jumped trenches in the bush, I saw charred and dismembered bodies of old and young people.

The mobs chased me for what seemed like ages determined to do their worst. I fell into a hole and passed out. I must have stayed in the hole for many hours as it was now dark when I regained consciousness. Minutes later I heard voices of people searching for me saying, “We must find him and kill him! He is somewhere around here! He is an infidel, a Christian!” I was so afraid and started

praying. As I prayed, I felt an overwhelming assuring power come over as if to say, “Be still, I am with you always.” I got up and climbed out of the hole and started saying these words as I walked aimlessly “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4) then the sound of a gunshot and flickers of torch lights interrupted me.

Thank God! The soldiers came to my rescue. Days later as we went to corper’s lodge to pick our belongings, all had been burnt except my Book of Mormon. ■

