

ASIA LOCAL PAGES

ASIA AREA LEADER MESSAGE

“Ministering”

By Elder Peter F. Meurs

First Counselor in the Asia Area Presidency

This year, members of the Area Presidency, together with Area Seventies, have met separately with each stake and district presidency to understand their goals and plans for 2019. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to understand the vision of each presidency and to feel of the love that these great leaders have for the members of their districts and stakes.

One of the important discussion topics during these meetings was ministering. While we learned of many excellent

examples of personal ministering occurring across the area, we found that there are still some misconceptions and uncertainties about how to successfully implement true ministering.

From the ministering section of the Church website, we learn, “Ministering is learning of and attending to others’ needs. It is doing the Lord’s work. When we minister, we are representing Jesus Christ and acting as His agents to watch over, lift, and strengthen those around us.”¹



Elder Peter F. Meurs

To aid understanding in some of the leadership meetings I attended with stake presidents, we had the following conversation: We asked the stake presidency, clerks and executive secretaries to think about less active member families or individuals from their home ward that they know on a personal basis. We asked them to think about people that they had worked with in a previous calling. We said it could be a neighbor or a family friend, it could be someone that had been one of their church leaders or it could be a recent convert that has lost his or her way.

We then asked them to consider if they could have just one ministering assignment, which of these families or individuals could they help and bless the most? Who would be the most likely to respond positively? And who, if we truly ministered to them, did they think could come back and once again enjoy the blessings of participating in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We then asked each person to share who they had felt impressed to minister to. In every case, every leader had felt an impression about someone. In many cases, they said that they had been concerned about these families or individuals for some time and that they had wanted to minister to them.





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In some cases, they said that they had assigned others to minister, but as they now thought about the family or individual, they felt the importance of personally ministering to them.

When we asked the leaders how they felt about these individuals and families, in every case they said that they loved them and expressed how much they wanted to help them. They all felt that ministering to these families would be a blessing to themselves, their ministering companions and to the families.

We then asked, “How could this be applied in your stake or district? Could you have this same conversation with members of the stake council? Could you have the same conversation with elders quorum presidencies and Relief Society presidencies? Could an elders quorum president or Relief Society president have this conversation with their members?”

Think about what would happen in our wards and branches if our initial ministering assignments were made based on the desires of leaders and members to bless others. Assignments by elders quorum and Relief Society leaders could be made after counselling with their brothers and sisters and then consulting with bishops. Companions could be assigned that would be blessed by the experience.

As President Nelson taught the Church about ministering in a higher and holier way, he quoted these powerful scriptures: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”² In that spirit, Jesus also taught, “ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people.”³

It is my firm testimony that as we follow the invitation of a prophet of

God to minister in a higher and holier way; that as we pray and seek guidance and then act on the promptings; as we show Christlike love to those that we minister to and seek to find ways to bless them and rekindle their faith, that they will naturally want to return and be with us. The joy that we will feel as our friends, loved ones and neighbors return is the same as that described in the scripture, “And if it so be that you should labor all your days . . . and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!”⁴

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught, “Brothers and sisters, we have a heaven-sent opportunity as an entire Church to demonstrate ‘pure religion . . . undefiled before God’—to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light’ and to ‘comfort those that stand in need of comfort,’ to minister to the widows and the fatherless, the married and the single, the strong and the distraught, the downtrodden and the robust, the happy and the sad—in short, all of us, every one of us, because we all need to feel the warm hand of friendship and hear the firm declaration of faith.”⁵ ■

NOTES

1. See www.ChurchofJesusChrist.org/ministering/what-is-ministering
2. Matthew 22:37, 39.
3. 3 Nephi 13:25.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:15.
5. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Be With and Strengthen Them,” *Liahona*, May 2018, 102.

LOCAL PAGES

Family History Awakening

Elder Martin

India Bengaluru Mission

It was an exciting evening for Annapurna Vadlamani (Anu), a Visakhapatman resident. She was one of over a hundred people that gathered for a family history conference in Visakhapatman, India on January 26, 2019.

Why did she and so many others attend? Why would anyone want to dig up their genealogical roots? Many are very eager to do family history since the prophet, President Russell M. Nelson, announced that a temple will soon be built in India.

Anu was enthusiastic to share why she attended the event and why she loves doing family history. She is currently the Visak District family history consultant and self-reliance specialist for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints. Anu was also asked to translate for one of the speakers from English to Telugu during the event. She is married and has four children.

In 2008, she desired to find her paternal grandmother's family history. Since she had passed away, Anu tried to find her grandmother's sister. All Anu knew was her name, the city, and that she lived on Temple Street.

Anu traveled to another city, seven months pregnant with her two little children on her quest. When she arrived at Temple Street, she began asking people if anyone knew her. She said, "It was like the Lord's hand was there, helping". Each person she asked drew her a little closer until she found her great-aunt. It was like a miracle.

At first, she was worried if she would be accepted. Her great-aunt is Hindu and Anu is a member of the Church. She had only met her once before. However, her grandmother's sister warmly welcomed her.

Anu eagerly sketched the four-generation family pedigree as they visited for two hours, "she was like an encyclopedia of information". Anu exclaimed, "It was an amazing experience! I'll never forget it! I felt a strong connection with my ancestors, like they were waiting for me to get the information recorded." Anu explained that India's government didn't record birth and death dates. Approximate dates were typically remembered by lunar calendar. For example, a birth date may be recorded as five days after the full moon.

Anu was the first in her family to be baptized, then her sister and finally her mother joined the Church. At first,





Anu's sister was strongly against her joining the Church. However, when the missionaries told her more about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation, and that she could see her grandmother again, she got very excited and knew it was true! She loved and missed her grandmother very much. Her maternal grandparents took care of her and her sister when they were

little during a time when her father was out of work. She was baptized and became strong in her faith.

One of Anu's favorite experiences was going to the Hong Kong Temple for the first time to do baptisms for the dead. She did 90 baptisms that day. She said, "The water was warm, but I didn't get tired even though I was pregnant and a little apprehensive".

Anu loves awakening others about their family history and telling them about familysearch.org. She shares her testimony often and exclaims, "It might look like a gigantic task, but it is not. All you need are names and dates and we will help you with the rest."

The family history event was held at the Church building in Visakhapatman. Several speakers from different backgrounds came and shared their stories. ■

Firesides Focus on Family History and Temple Work

Jeanette Hurst

India Public Affairs

Frédéric Arokium, Geeta and Arvin Naidu and Gurcharan Gill are on a mission. They traveled to India in January to raise awareness of family history and to encourage people across the country to seek out their ancestors and to prepare for the temple.

The group presented firesides in Chennai, Hyderabad, Rajahmundry and Visakhapatnam.

Frédéric, a research biologist from Sandy, Utah, was born in France but his roots are in India. In 1854 his great-great-grandfather, Arokium (he had no last name and his name has become the family surname), left his village of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu and sailed from Chennai with his parents to Mauritius. His father was an indentured servant contracted to work in the sugar cane fields there.

After the death of his own father two years ago, Frédéric began to wonder about his family history. “We could trace all our family in Mauritius, but the connection to India was lost,” he explained. “I was curious about this great-great-grandfather Arokium, whose first name became my last name, so I asked my aunt for his picture. I had tears in my eyes when I saw it. I took a copy to the National

Archives [in Mauritius] to find out where he came from.” That is where Arokium’s quest began.

More than 150 years after his ancestors left, Frédéric returned to India to find out more about them. “Being in Chennai,” he said, “is very emotional for me. This is where all my ancestors boarded ships at different times to



Gurcharan S. Gill (center) with fireside attendees

Arvind Naidu speaks with others at the Family History fireside.



come over to a strange land. I believe that it was heart-rending to leave, but they kept moving forward with hope in their hearts. They have sacrificed a lot for us to be where we are today.”

He added, “It is important to know their story to better appreciate my life now and understand the amazing legacy they left to me: courage, hope, hard work, hospitality, strong family values and faith in God.”

Frédéric wants to help others find their Indian roots. For this reason, he has created the Indian Diaspora Genealogy Group on Facebook.

His message to Saints in India is to get a temple recommend; start talking to family members and gather names, old photos and stories; get in touch with a family history consultant; download the FamilySearch app and create an account; enter your ancestors’ names and get their temple work done.

Both Arvind and Geeta Naidu are from Fiji and claim Indian heritage. Despite having lived in the U.S. for many years, they haven’t forgotten their Indian roots and have been to India several times looking for their ancestors.

Geeta explained, “In Fiji we are separated from India. We have lost

contact. There are millions of us out there that love India and want to connect to our ancestors.”

Geeta’s grandfather Ibrahim was a Muslim. “He came from the village of Diwari in Haryana in 1911 as an indentured servant to work in the sugar cane fields,” she said. “He became a Christian, married and had four children. When his wife died in childbirth, he left them in an orphanage and returned to India. I am looking for him.”

Geeta continued, “We came to India trying to find our forefathers,

but our initial attempts were fruitless, so we changed our strategy. A friend who is a family history consultant suggested that maybe the Lord’s mission for me was to become a ‘heart specialist’ to my people first, and it would lead me to my nana. These inspired words motivated us to turn our focus to our fellow Indian members to help them catch the vision of family history and temple work.”

The Naidus have been inspired by Gurcharan S. Gill, a retired professor of mathematics from Brigham Young University and former and

first president of the India Bengaluru Mission from 1993 to 1995.

President Gill is from the village of Dhudike outside the town of Moga in the Punjab. Although he has lived in the United States for 65 years, he is still very connected to his Indian heritage.

As a young man, he lost his older sister Nasib to hepatitis in 1953 and then his youngest brother to bone disease in 1954. “I wondered what happened when people die,” he said, “but found no satisfactory answer.” His questions were answered when,



From left to right: Peter Bushi, Frédéric Arokium, Gurcharan Gill, and Geeta and Arvind Naidu spoke recently about searching for their Indian ancestors.

as a young graduate student in California, he came into contact with the Church.

President Gill described his spiritual journey. “In 1955, I went to a lot of churches in Fresno, California, and asked these questions but found no satisfactory answers. The mother of my classmate suggested that I should look for answers at [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]. Another LDS classmate invited me to attend a stake conference. I went to the stake conference and heard about the plan of salvation. A miracle indeed! At the stake conference I met the stake and full-time missionaries and they taught me the true gospel. It took eight months of learning. In January of 1956, I was baptized and shortly thereafter I received a wonderful patriarchal blessing. The patriarch promised me that my mission in this life is to help redeem my ancestors.”

“In 1986,” he said, “I went back to India with my parents to visit relatives and found my four generations. I also found tax revenue records for my ancestors who were landowners. Using those records, I went back eight generations.”

Since 2003, he has devoted most of his time to family history. “This is missionary work!” he said.

In 2010, he received permission to photograph tax records in 320 villages where his family was from. “Using

those records,” he said, “I have found the names of 250,000 ancestors and relatives and have traced my genealogy back to 2200 B.C.”

Now he spends six to eight hours a day poring over digitized land records researching the Gill Clan. “If you seek, you shall find,” he said.

Peter Bushi, a family history manager for the Church and a counselor in the Hyderabad Stake presidency, acknowledges that for most Indians, finding genealogical records is a challenge. “Start your search by talking with family members,” he advised. “If necessary, make a trip to your ancestral village and gather information from extended family and elders there.”

Moving beyond collective memory, President Bushi points out that a variety of sources for Indian genealogy can be found at familysearch.org, which include church, temple and government records containing information about births, marriages and deaths from the twelfth century to the present.

After the fireside in Chennai, Frédéric talked excitedly with a young woman from the audience. It appears that they have ancestors from the same village in Tamil Nadu. Perhaps her research can help him find another generation of family. They exchanged contact information.

“This is a labor of love,” Frédéric said. “After all they have done for me, this is the least I can do for them.” ■

There’s an Eternal Plan for Every One of Us

Manasi Kundu
Kolkata

The plan of salvation is the eternal grand plan by the virtue of which, all of our Heavenly Father’s spirit children can be born into mortality and receive a physical body. It is a state of probation that allows us to overcome challenges and exercise our faith in Jesus Christ. It is this same plan that enables us to return to His promised kingdom where we’ll have the opportunity to grow eternally in knowledge and in truth.

During his address in the October 2018 general conference, President Dallin H. Oaks stated that the plan of salvation “provides a perfect balance between eternal justice and the mercy we can obtain through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It enables us to be transformed into new creatures in Christ”.¹ It is through this slow and steady process of transformation that we leave behind small but lasting footsteps over a lifetime that leads us to the tree of life that Lehi saw in his dream.

My journey started when I was introduced to the Church in 2015 by my son (who is a graduate student in Texas), while he was visiting Kolkata. It was then that I had received my

"I am positive in my mind that the Lord has planned our destiny. Sometime we'll understand fully, and when we see back from the vantage point of the future, we shall be satisfied with many of the happenings of this life that are so difficult for us to comprehend."

—President Spencer W. Kimball

first Book of Mormon in Bengali and had the opportunity to visit the Relief Society president of our Kolkata Branch. Soon enough, I started taking lessons through Skype from the elders in the India New Delhi Mission. On 18 June 2016, my daughter and I became the newest members of our Kolkata Branch. My son was present to baptize us.

It was the beginning of a new chapter in my life, an experience that has left a profound impact since. The promise of baptism is the first step to join the fold of our Heavenly Father's covenant children and it consists of our being willing to obey all of God's commandments. Just as we immerse ourselves backwards into the waters of baptism, it provides us a chance to revisit our old life; and to cleanse ourselves of all our past sins and transgressions. And as we come forward out of the water, it is as if we have our eyes fixed onto our future: to receive eternal life. Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is the immediate essential step toward this eternal progression. We are promised guidance, protection and knowledge about the truth through promptings and feelings, that can come from the continual presence of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

The Book of Mormon describes the Holy Ghost as the "Comforter (that) filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God" (Moroni 8:26).

As much joy as a new birth in the family can bring; the loss of a loved one can be equally devastating. I lost my husband in 2015. When I learned about the plan of salvation for the first time, it brought great comfort to me. Although it was a new doctrine, it somehow seemed so familiar. Not only had it given me hope at a very challenging period of my life, but also, I was made cognizant of the true love that our Heavenly Father has for me and for all of His children.

The challenges and tragedies that we must survive are very much part and parcel of our mortal existence and no one knows our state of affliction better than our Heavenly Father. President Spencer W. Kimball said, "I am positive in my mind that the Lord has planned our destiny. Sometime we'll understand fully, and when we see back from the vantage point of the future, we shall be satisfied with many of the happenings of this life that are so difficult for us to comprehend."²

This is the whole essence of the plan of salvation. It is through overcoming obstacles that we can strengthen our testimonies and our faith in Jesus Christ and find comfort in His Atonement. We eagerly chose to come earthward, to experience joys and sorrows, ease and pain, comforts and hardships, health and sickness, successes and disappointments, and we knew also that after a period of life we would die. It would be the next essential step to the Resurrection and to eternal life.

The knowledge about, and my testimony of, our Heavenly Father's eternal plan of happiness is what has propelled me to stay firm in the gospel. I always look forward to Sunday as it provides me with an opportunity to partake of the sacrament and to renew my baptismal covenants and learn and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with other Church members. It has greatly enhanced my knowledge about ordinances and the Lord's temple. I look forward to my endowment in the next few months. I couldn't be more grateful to my Heavenly Father for the blessings I've seen in my life and I extend my prayers unto him for our General Authorities, local authorities, all our missionaries and church members across the globe and for all their families. ■

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "Truth and the Plan," *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 26.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 20.