

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

I Will Be Your Light

Elder O. Vincent Haleck

Area President

The Lord has always been mindful of His servants and has made commitments to them. He has made these commitments through covenants.

To Joshua, the Lord declared, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

“Be strong and of a good courage” (Joshua 1:5–6).

To Lehi’s family as they journeyed to the promised land, the Lord declared, “I will also be your light in the wilderness . . . ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led” (1 Nephi 17:13).

Today in the Pacific Area we have modern day Lehis and Joshuas who have come to a remembrance of the Lord’s goodness and blessings in their lives. It is said that remembrance is a sign of gratitude. Throughout our Area we have invited senior couples to come and serve in those parts of the Pacific where the Church is still emerging. To those who have served and are serving, it is their way of giving back to others who are newly converted to the Church. The missionary couple’s own origins in the Church may have begun many years earlier, when missionaries from America came to teach their ancestors who accepted the gospel. Those early island converts, at first were unfamiliar with their new faith,

just like those who are recent members in the emerging Church. Now we call on our modern-day senior couples from the established Church to come and help strengthen their brothers and sisters in the emerging Church. Indeed, they are being “a light in the wilderness.” The Spirit of the Lord will testify through their example that it is by the influence of the Lord that they are being led. Our senior missionaries are helping and showing how to apply and live the principles of the gospel.

Senior missionary couples are making a difference as they apply their experience and teach members how to conduct the Church and how to apply the gospel in their daily lives. There is a cultural compatibility with the people in places like Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands and Kiribati. Our serving couples have come from Samoa and Tonga, as well as Samoans and Tongans who reside in the United States, New Zealand



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Brother Viiga and Sister Lupe Fuimaono



Brother Lamese and Sister Loreta Taala

and Australia. We also had a couple from Papua New Guinea who served.

Consider the testimonies of couples who have served, or are serving:

“Our two-year mission to the Solomon Islands was one of the best experiences we have had in our lives

together, . . . which has helped us gain a firm testimony . . . to understand the love of our Father in Heaven and our Saviour for us, and all of His children. We have felt rejuvenated and strengthened and to “walk and not faint”. We witnessed miracles and the



Brother Peter and Sister Serena Jackson

hand of the Lord in our lives and the lives of the Saints in the progress of the work”. —*Brother Viiga and Sister Lupe Fuimaono, Pesega Samoa Stake*

“For many years, I served under the direction of various stake presidents as a stake clerk. The knowledge and experience I gained has prepared us to serve and assist the priesthood and auxiliary leaders in the Daru Papua New Guinea Stake. We consider this a blessing. Serving the Lord with my eternal companion, Sister Taala, is always a blessing”. —*Brother Lamese and Sister Loreta Taala, Pago Pago Samoa West Stake*

“Our service in Papua New Guinea has meant a great deal to us, especially for Brother Jackson, as a native of the country. Our service was a longed-for return to PNG to proclaim the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to our family and people. Wearing our missionary badges each day gave us extraordinary strength of faith and hope.” —*Brother Peter and Sister Serena Jackson, Eight Mile Plains Australia Stake*

“Thank you for getting these wonderful couples to serve here in PNG. They’re a tremendous help for the development of the Church and strengthening the members here. They serve as leaders, advisors, trainers and teachers in their branches and wards. They also help our full-time elders minister to both nonmembers and less-active members returning to full activity. As a result, I am seeing



President and Sister Hafoka

the increase in sacrament meeting attendance. The sisters are helping in Primary, Young Women and Relief Society to strengthen those auxiliaries”.
—President Finau Hafoka, Papua New Guinea Port Moresby Mission

In their service, our missionary couples are establishing the Church. They are the means through which

the Lord is bringing the light of His gospel to a people and to a country. Seeds are being planted in fertile hearts and minds. The Lord’s promise is evident, He “will be on [their] right and on [their] left, and [His] Spirit shall be in [their] hearts and [His] angels round about to bear [them] up” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:88). ■

LOCAL PAGES

My First Prayer Ever Saved My Life

Tanya Lapu’aho

I didn’t know how dark my life had been until I experienced the light. I grew up in a home with drugs, alcohol, violence and severe abuse in all its hideous forms. It wasn’t until my late teens that a friend pointed out that what I was going through was not normal and was not okay.

The trauma of my childhood led to severe substance abuse and mental health issues that made it hard for me to trust or connect with others, as well as a debilitating fear of being alone.

Emotionally, I was a ticking time bomb that almost went off in 2018.

The darkness had become too great to bear and I decided that I didn’t want to live anymore. Moments before I intended to end my pain, I suddenly heard the voice of my nana: “Be strong dear and trust in the Lord. He loves you.”

I was raised in a semi-Christian family who seemed to have a specific distaste for all things related to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But my nana was born a member of the Church and remained a member until her early adolescence. She was forced to convert to a different Christian denomination after she married my grandfather.

All my life she would secretly tell me about her love for the church she was raised in and her testimony of the gospel. She would share scriptures and sayings from the Church when we talked. Something she said often was, “Be strong dear and trust in the Lord. He loves you.”

I was not a fan of Christianity at the time but for some reason, as my nana’s words rang in my ears, I knew that I needed to pray. I dropped to my knees and said my first prayer ever. I cried the entire time—so much that I wondered if even God could decipher my words through the sobs.

I begged Heavenly Father to heal my soul, to help me overcome the darkness that I had suffered with all my life. I offered Him an agreement: “If you carry me through and help me



Tanya's baptism day



Tanya



Tanya as a baby with her nana



Tanya and her husband

survive, in the new year, I will start going to church.”

The prayer left me too exhausted to even get onto my bed let alone hurt myself. I curled up on the floor where I was and slept till morning.

When I woke up, I felt a lot better.

As the days and weeks went by, I continued to feel better and better. When the end of the year arrived, I could not deny that the Lord had clearly held up His end of the agreement and I decided that I would uphold mine.

The words of my nana saved my life that day. Those same words were what led me to type LDS.org into my computer when it was time to find a church. Of all the churches I could have chosen, it was the most natural thing to me to seek out The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because I loved my nana and she loved it.

As I drove up to the chapel on Rua Road I felt an overwhelming darkness come over me. I felt as

though I was doing something wrong. In my mind there was a voice saying, “wouldn't you rather be at home? Don't you want some wine? Don't you want to relax?”

The feeling was so strong that when I finally parked, I was shaking too much to get out of the car. The doubt and fear almost won until I remembered something: *I've been here before, I know this darkness. I know that I can pray, and God will answer.*

I prayed out loud. “Give me a sign that I’m meant to be here,” I said. As I spoke, I felt a rush of calm as overwhelming as the darkness that it chased away.

I got out of my car and walked through the church doors. I immediately locked eyes with a stranger and felt instantly connected and comfortable with her. During the meeting she whispered to me, helping me to understand the messages. As the meeting ended, she asked for my name and number. She was shocked when she heard my maiden name.

“That’s my last name!” she said.

We discovered that our grandfathers were brothers and that we were in fact family. I remember being overcome with emotion as I felt the Lord speak lovingly to my heart saying, “There’s your sign.”

From there everything happened quickly. I learned the gospel from the elders, married my wonderful husband and two days later was baptised.

My life has continued to fill with the light of Christ, a light that in my childhood I did not believe existed. I am so grateful to my nana for her faith and bravery and her determination to turn me to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ; to my husband and his family who loved me through my issues; to my newfound cousin who made me feel at home that day and to my Father in Heaven who is always waiting to pour out His blessings upon us. ■

Accepting the Love of Heavenly Father

Irene Brunt-Craig

When my father passed away, I made all the wrong choices. I stayed away from God.

I was emotionally drained and angry. My heart had been shattered and I often asked myself, “How could God do this to me?”

I recall the days just before my father passed. He had been ill for a little while by then. I remember calling everyone at the church I belonged to at the time and asking them to pray for my father. I remember gathering my siblings and praying together for Dad’s health to improve.

My father was the most important person in my life, and I could not imagine life without him. I prayed with more fervour and sincerity than I had ever done in my whole life. I did have a testimony of Jesus Christ, but this was the first time I had ever really asked God for anything. Despite my earnest prayers, my dad passed away. The bitter disappointment made me angry, and I let my grief isolate me from my Father in Heaven.

I didn’t see at the time that doing this only separated me from the comforting power of the Spirit. That Spirit, which could have healed my heart and given me understanding, was pushed away. I was deeply hurt that

my sincere and desperate prayers had not been answered.

When the Spirit isn’t with you, things can quickly become too much to handle. I was lost and I didn’t know where to turn.

At the time, I was dating a wonderful young man who belonged to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Dustine Craig. He was serving a two-year mission, and that separation from him only added to the isolation.

The missionaries started to visit me. I loved the sweet spirit they brought and the talks we enjoyed. Even though my love for Dustine did make me think



Making the decision to say that prayer and ask for help was the start of a new path in my life.

more seriously of joining the Church, I just wasn't ready to make that life-changing decision to be baptised.

After a while, the missionaries stopped visiting. Once again, I was left to myself and I could feel that something was missing. It was a time of deep soul searching and struggle. I didn't want to ask God for a witness. I didn't want to ask God for anything. I was far too scared of being let down—again.

Eventually I desired to know if what the missionaries had taught me was true, so I knelt in prayer and sincerely asked Heavenly Father to please send the missionaries a message to come and visit me again. Three days after my prayer, two missionaries knocked on my door.

I was so filled with the Spirit and extremely grateful the Lord had decided to bless me with exactly what I had asked for; I could not hold back my tears when I saw them. One of the missionaries was a friend of Dustine's from the Missionary Training Centre. Dustine had asked his friend to look out for me. That elder mentioned Dustine's request, and he also said the previous elders who had visited me had also left a message specifically for him to visit.

Making the decision to say that prayer and ask for help was the start of a new path in my life. I felt Heavenly Father's presence more keenly every day. As I allowed the Spirit to bring me understanding

around my father's passing, I started having dreams where I could see Heavenly Father sitting there with me as I bitterly grieved Dad's death. The Lord was there all along; through every single tear drop. I stopped feeling so alone and isolated. Finally, I was letting Him in. I stopped using my hurt as an excuse to push God away and began to see in my trials just how much my Saviour loved and recognized me.

During the third discussion with the missionaries, I could not contain my feelings anymore. I broke down in tears and told them that I knew that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was true, and I knew that God was real.



Irene with her mother



Irene with her father

Heavenly Father *had* answered my prayers when my father died. He did not save Dad from death as I had asked, but He had been there all along to comfort me as I mourned. Though I chose not to see it at the time, Heavenly Father does not give up on us. He patiently stayed with me throughout my journey of conversion, until I was able to receive for myself a witness that He does answer our prayers. I was baptised soon after and today I am so grateful for my testimony and membership in this gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

Unity and Strength in West Auckland

Melissa Inouye

Latter-day Saints, Muslims and others grieve together in wake of Christchurch terrorist attacks

On 17 March, a Sunday evening, Muslims and Latter-day Saints gathered in West Auckland to grieve together and affirm shared faith in God.

The chapel and cultural hall of the Henderson Stake centre of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Massey were filled by members of the community, including local government officials, listening to addresses from

Anne Degia-Pala, a Muslim women's leader, Sheikh Muhammad Shafee, imam at Ranui Masjid, Sister Linda Dickey, a social worker who works with Muslim community members, and President Aaron Wi Repa, president of the Henderson Stake.

"Today is the second day since evil walked amongst our people in New Zealand and shot a very high-powered semi-automatic weapon in a sacred place of worship, our mosque in Christchurch," said Anne Degia-Pala.

"Fifteen March is a turning point . . . We will turn for the better, we will stand in solidarity, human to human, sisters and brothers."

President Wi Repa of the Henderson Stake said, "You are always welcome amongst our people. You are us, and together this is our home. We mourn and grieve with you."

Midway through the devotional, just before the 6:35 time of prayer, Muslim sisters and brothers left the chapel and conducted their evening prayers in two rooms the Latter-day Saints had prepared. At the close of the devotional, everyone enjoyed refreshments in the cultural hall. Muslims and Latter-day Saints embraced each other. One Muslim sister said, "In the beginning we thought that we would have to grieve alone, but now we know that we don't."

Auckland City Councillor Linda Cooper was in attendance. She posted

a message on Facebook, along with a striking photo of the imam preaching from the Latter-day Saint pulpit, that has been widely shared beyond New Zealand: "It was a beautiful thing to see the imam from Ranui Mosque giving a sermon at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Massey tonight. The church members opened their arms to the local Muslim community to share an interdenominational service. They also provided rooms for each man and woman to perform their 6:35 p.m. prayers. Anne Degia-Pala also spoke as a Muslim women's leader. We were truly brothers and sisters tonight."

Following the refreshments, members of the Henderson Stake, led by members of the stake presidency, went to the Ranui Masjid (also known as the West Auckland Islamic Centre). They lay wreaths outside the mosque. The Muslim community then invited them inside. Muslims and Latter-day Saints crowded in and President Wi Repa was invited to say a few words. Many remained to chat and mingle.

"As I exited the mosque," says Anna Featherstone, interfaith specialist for the Henderson Stake and an organiser of the event, "I saw that a group of our members had brought a guitar and were outside singing along with some of the sisters from the mosque. Then the prayers started up inside. As I stood on the threshold the two melodies

entwined themselves: ‘Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine,’ mingled with the strains of Muslim prayer chants. It was a moment I will never forget.”

Chelsea Tarati, a member of the Henderson Stake, posted the following message on the stake Facebook page: “Never had I ever imagined I would be sitting in a mosque amongst our own members and Muslim friends and be feeling the peace and warmth that I felt last night. Although tragedy and loss has been part of the reason that brought us together, I felt a sense of joy, love and appreciation as we met with brothers and sisters from the Muslim religion. Our stake leaders have opened a door and I personally look forward to learning more about our Muslim community and building new friendships.”

Immran Ali, secretary of the mosque, sent the following message after the event: “I just wanted to thank your community for the beautiful aroha they showed to our community today. It was absolutely amazing. Thank you, and let’s keep in touch.”

Out of this tragedy the women and men of faith in West Auckland are working to build something beautiful—ongoing relationships of respect and love. Muslims and Latter-day Saints exchanged contact details and began making plans to get together for family night, for lunch and service opportunities. ■



PHOTOS BY DANIEL SCOTT AND SAM GAVIOLA