

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Ministering in Every Season

Elder Ian S. Ardern

President in the Pacific Area Presidency



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The Christmas season is upon us once more. Tinsel and flashing lights crowd evergreen trees, carols fill the air, shops and malls are crowded with people who seem to be jubilant in their expectation of a joyous Christmas Day. These are the days when memories are made and so I pause to ponder what memories I will help make for those around me. They must surely go beyond a plastic toy, a new shirt, an intriguing novel or a favorite food. Lasting memories

are those that touch your soul and the souls of others.

In my travels through the Pacific, I have sensed that many strive to make every day Christmas Day. I see members of the Church who add joy to the lives of others as they minister to them in a higher and holier way. Meals are made, lawns cut, hands held, and reassurances given and thereby lives are blessed. In this season of service, it is good to consider some simple principles about

ministering to others in every season.¹ Below are five of those principles that have impacted on me:

1. Learn about those you minister to.

President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “You can’t serve well those you don’t know well.” If you don’t already know those you have been called to minister to, now is the perfect season. If you think you know them well, determine to get to know them even better.





2. Spend time together.

A relationship takes time to develop so visit often with those you are called to minister to. Use whatever means make sense—such as email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, phone calls, or sending a card to keep in contact. Personal contacts

don't need to be long, but they do need to be genuine.

3. Communicate with caring.

Building meaningful relationships requires sharing feelings, beliefs, goals, and concerns. By sharing day-to-day events and life's challenges with each other as guided by the Spirit, we gain appreciation for each other.

4. Listening is a critical part of communicating that you care.

When you listen carefully, your opportunity to help others come unto

Christ increases. As you gain understanding and insight into their needs, they feel loved, understood, and safe.

5. Give service.

When those we minister to feel our genuine love through our acts of service, it can soften hearts and increase love and trust. How very grateful I have been for those small acts of service that have been done for me. While they may have seemed small to the giver, as the recipient I was lifted and strengthened. As our service brings others to the ordinances of the priesthood, we bless their lives.

In the 25th chapter of Matthew we read:

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

“Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

“When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

“Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?



“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:34-40).

My prayer this festive season is that we will be reminded as we look all around that we are all in need and that many of those needs will be met as we become true ministers to others. Surely giving of ourselves is the great

lesson of our Redeemer this Christmas season for He gave His life that we might be receivers of life eternal.

Merry Christmas to one and all. ■

NOTE

1. See “Build Meaningful Relationships,” *Ensign*, August 2018, 6-9.

LOCAL PAGES

Celebrating Christmas Across the Pacific

All over the Pacific area, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints find unique and inspired ways to bring Christ to the centre of their Christmas celebrations.

Here are some of their stories.

Light the World

Waireka Collings

The traditions we have started with our family have come out of the Light the World initiative.

In the first year, we participated because it sounded fun. We thought, “Well, let’s give it a go and see how we get on.”

I began planning little things that we could do:

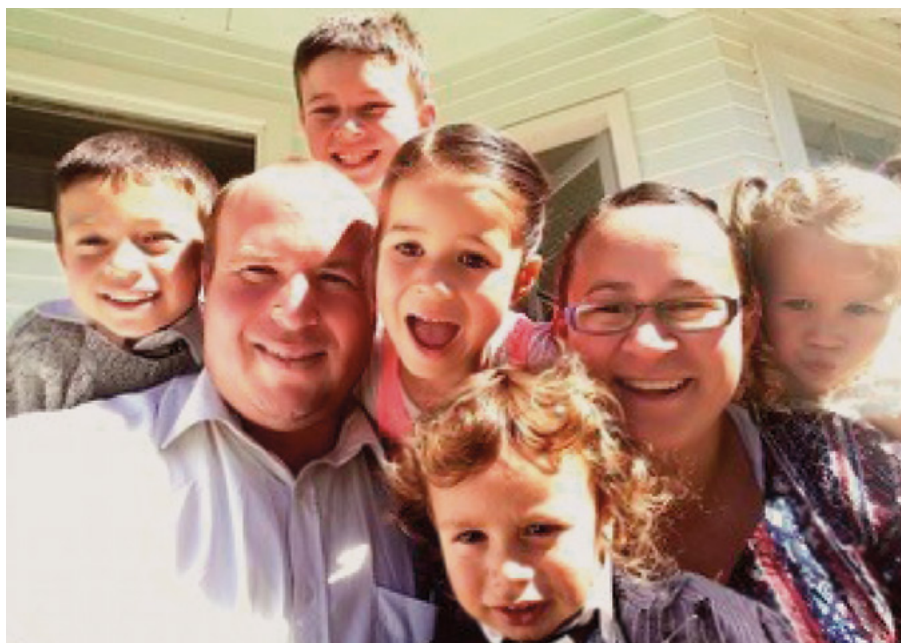
- Serve our neighbours and those around us.
- Make Christmas more meaningful to the children, focusing less on what they can get out of Christmas

and more about what they can give.

We had been looking for ways to get into the spirit of Christmas for a while. The Light the World initiative has been the answer for us. Even after only two years of doing it, there are already many traditions that the

children talk about as though they have always been with our family. I am amazed at the power and effect it has had on us.

Over the time that we have followed the Light the World initiative we have been able to donate food to the



food bank and share goodness on our social media accounts. We have done things like take a cake to a neighbour who had just moved in or take a basket of treats to the local health centre to support those who are sick or otherwise afflicted.

The tradition we love the most is on Christmas Eve. This is where we re-create the story of Jesus and spend a night in Bethlehem. We dress as



they would have dressed. We try to eat food that they would have eaten, and we talk about Jesus and what kind of life he had.

It is easy to talk about the great things that Jesus did. On Christmas Eve we try to talk about the difficulties He experienced. With no fixed abode, He was always relying on the help of strangers. We talk about how we can be the strangers that reach out and lift those who need our support.

On Christmas Day, instead of a gingerbread house, the kids put together a gingerbread stable with Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. I think it is good for children to know and understand that the greatest person that ever lived on this earth started out as a baby and had to learn everything He knew just like them. Not only did He start as a baby, but He came to earth in the humblest of circumstances.

Children are so open to the feelings of the Spirit. They just seem to get the concepts wholeheartedly. These teaching moments make it all worth it.

Christmas is such a wonderful occasion in our household. There is a certain reverence, and now, expectation from the children to carry out these traditions each year. I look forward to the day when we can participate in these same traditions in the homes of our grown children. I hope that they will be able to reflect fondly on memories such as these that sealed their testimonies and knowledge of

the truthfulness of the birth and life of our Saviour and his sacred ministry on the earth.

Treats, Decorations and Daily Reminders

Paula Matenga

When my children were very young, we started a Christmas tradition that has lasted through the years. It was a countdown calendar with a Christ-centred twist. The feature, a simple 24-piece nativity set that I made from wood.

The manger on the mantle would start December empty. Each day the children would take turns picking out, and placing, the next nativity piece and eating the treat that went with it.

Stretching a nativity scene to 24 pieces meant that there were a few extra sheep and camels, but every significant piece would have a scripture written on the back. The scripture would be read and there would be a discussion around the significance of the figure chosen. The angels, the wise men, the shepherds the star and, of course, Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

Putting up the nativity scene bit by bit meant that the story of Christ's birth was shared throughout the entire month of December. Every day, in amongst the hustle and bustle of Christmas festivities, we were reminded of the true meaning of Christmas.

When Christmas morning did arrive, the full Nativity, and its full



A Gift for Jesus on Christmas Day

Sophia Grey

When I was about five or six, I came up with the idea of giving a present to Jesus at Christmas. I remember being very conscious, as a child, that Jesus is our brother. I wanted to include Him in what we did as a family, as only a child can.

Gift giving is such a big part of Christmas. I had concluded that as Jesus Christ was gift enough Himself, what we should do is decide what we were going to do as a gift to Him.

I found a box with a lid, wrapped it in Christmas paper with a bow, and wrote on a little tag the message: "To Jesus, from The Greys."

I asked my family to write what they were going to do as a gift to Jesus in the coming year. Things like "I'm going to try and forgive others more for you," or "I'm going to try to be a peacemaker for you," or even "I'm going to do things for mum and dad without being told."

I don't remember any exact gifts that were written, as it was about 20 years ago when we started, but the spirit of those gift has remained.

On Christmas morning, before opening any presents, we would read from Luke, open the gift for Jesus box and read to each other what we were going to give Him that year.

This simple tradition brought Christ into our Christmas because it made us feel like he was there. As a

meaning, was there at the centre of our celebrations.

Our children do not grow out of these traditions. They stay with them even into adulthood. They don't reminisce on the presents they received growing up, but the time spent together as family and the traditions they could count on every year. Because they looked forward to this particular tradition, I ended up sending a smaller set to my boys on their missions so that they and their companions could have a little bit of home at Christmas time.

My children have their own families now, so I have made a countdown calendar for each of them so they can carry on this tradition with their children.

For children, Christmas should be fun. The gospel should be fun, full of joy and excitement. The Christmas traditions enjoyed by the world can be Christ-centred if we are creative. Giving and receiving gifts doesn't have to be materialistic. It represents the gift given to all of us by Heavenly Father; the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, and everything that means.



child, I was happy because He was getting a present just like us, just like one of our family. It reminded us of what the important things were, and that He is our brother! We love Him just as much as our flesh and blood family, so why wouldn't we include Him in our happiest family time?

As I have grown older, I have come to understand that opening gifts on Christmas does not have to be superficial. The Saviour has given all of us the gift of the Atonement, the greatest of all gifts. I should

receive this gift with the eagerness of a child unwrapping a present on Christmas morning.

Christmas Morning at the Auckland City Mission: A 30-year Tradition of Christlike Service

Argentina Fatialofa

My life has been so blessed. We found the gospel in the early seventies and it has enriched our lives in every possible way.

In my line of work, I see so much sadness. Broken families, broken hearts. When I think about

the richness and blessings the gospel has brought into my life, I know I must give something back, particularly to those who have not found the gospel as I have.

Back in the early eighties, my children and I were looking for service opportunities as a way of showing more appreciation for what we had at Christmastime. It all began one year when we served dinner for the homeless and families in need, at the town hall. That's where it used to be held. It was a sweet, spiritual experience that meant so much to us as a family.

Since that first involvement, I have tried not to miss a year. We have served at the Auckland City Mission now for nearly thirty years. In that time, many different family members have come to join, us such as siblings and nieces and nephews, depending on who's around or their circumstances at the time.

For my children and I, this Christmas tradition has taught us humility. It has taught us to appreciate what the Atonement has given us. Everything we have we owe to the Saviour's Atonement. When I see so much on our table and so much under the tree at Christmas time, I know it is because of the blessings of the gospel that have enriched our lives.

Jesus Christ loves all mankind. I've felt that same compassion for those who come to the City Mission



Christmas luncheon. Regardless of situation or background, we welcome all who walk through those doors, just as the Saviour would. I love seeing them and treating them like family, especially those who are disabled or homeless.

The Saviour carried the cross without complaint. He suffered pain for my sins, and never once did He say He can't do it anymore, nor did He give up. Knowing what He suffered for me I must give something back to Him by serving and ministering to others in need.

I will keep this tradition as long as I am able to. I don't know how long that will be, but Christ never gave up on what He came to this earth to do for me. Until the Lord needs me elsewhere you will find me serving the

Lord and His children at the Auckland City Mission on Christmas Day.

Preparing for Christmas by Caring and Sharing

Perth, Australia Southern River Stake

Thousands of Australian children will not receive a gift this holiday season because their families can't afford it due to poverty. Women from the Perth Australia Southern River Stake Relief Society recently collected gifts to donate to The Smith Family Christmas Appeal for those in need.

One of the key purposes of the Relief Society organisation is to "work in unity to help those in need". With that mandate in mind, Latter-day Saint women were encouraged to purchase a gift for a child in accordance with The Smith Family guidelines and

bring it to a Christmas in July activity to place under a Christmas tree. The gifts collected will help the organisation achieve its goal to deliver more than 75,000 new toys and 50,000 new books to children in need around Australia.

Volunteers will be enlisted to sort, pack and deliver the gifts so they are ready for Christmas morning.

Sue Noney, the stake Relief Society President, remarked, "The sisters who participated in the activity believe in the precept contained in The Book of Mormon reference from Mosiah 2:17, stating that 'when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God'."

This project will provide an opportunity to bring a smile to a child's face this Christmas. ■





Planting a Seed with the Local Muslim Community

Newsroom

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Tuggerah Ward on the New South Wales Central Coast recently had the opportunity to take part in a community dialogue hosted by the Central Coast Islamic Cultural Centre.

The ward members first became acquainted with the Islamic Cultural Centre when their chapel was undergoing refurbishment. Bishop Val Moana of the Tuggerah Ward felt inspired that the leftover chapel chairs could be put to better use than being taken to the landfill. Bishop Moana explained, “We asked each of the ward members to prayerfully consider who might benefit from the usage of these old chapel chairs.”

The chairs were subsequently donated to members of the Islamic faith on the Central Coast. Mr. Mohammed Taib (Mosque Leader) from the Centre was deeply appreciative of the church for rendering such service.

Mr. Taib extended an invitation for the Tuggerah Ward members to participate in a community dialogue hosted by the Central Coast Islamic Cultural Centre. Ken Ferguson, who currently serves as an Interfaith Specialist in the Gosford Stake (diocese), attended the event and noted, “The meeting with the Islamic people at the mosque was a wonderful experience. The local Police were there and a minister from another faith.”

The Gosford Stake intends to continue working with members from the Islamic Cultural Centre as part of community dialogue and interfaith building on the New South Wales Central Coast.

Around the world, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regularly engage with various faiths and community groups to help build a camaraderie of respect and understanding. ■

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liahona-pacific@churchofjesuschrist.org