

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

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.

Let Your Light so Shine at Christmastime

Marlee Craig

Christmas in Samoa is much simpler. Folks are happy with the simple things.

Every year my Dad would spend more money adding to his already huge Christmas stash. This meant more lights, more work, and more giant Santas. The decorations went up long before December.

Putting up the lights was a huge job. The neighbourhood boys would be up on the roof with my dad and brother, stapling up more and more lights. It was my dad’s thing, and it was something he loved doing. Of

course, as a professional Christmas decorator, he knew exactly where he wanted every single light to go.

Many families in our neighbourhood would be at our house in the

evenings, helping with the lights.

After the lights were put in place, and after the inside of the house was transformed into the North Pole, the last thing to be erected was the huge



Marlee's nativity



Marlee's parents

stable. The stable was placed on the front lawn with all Nativity characters lit up and in place.

Many evenings at dinner time, we would come outside and see so many cars parked in front of our house with their families admiring the lights. Families would come out of the back part of the village with their children to look at the lights. We would hear choirs singing "O Holy Night" or "Silent Night".

I realised later that the reason my Dad put so much time and effort into the decorations, was because a lot of people in Samoa couldn't afford lights or Christmas trees. This was his way of bringing joy to the community. It wasn't about getting credit, it was truly about the spirit of Christmas. It was about being a light to the world from our little corner.

My mum would step out of the house with plates of cookies; there

was always something for everyone.

Over time, I realised that one of the greatest gestures of love is time. With every single light bulb that was tested, checked and put in its proper place to shine, it was all driven by love.

Putting up Christmas lights, preparing plates for the crowds & creating an atmosphere where the spirit can dwell, was a Christmas tradition of my family. People knew they could come to the Craig family house and feel that Christmas spirit.

I remember one particular Christmas I saw an elderly man arrive with his family. This family came every year to see the lights. I never knew where they lived, but I knew they were not from our village. The sons lifted the elderly man off the back of the truck and carried him to the front of our house where they sat to admire the lights. He especially loved looking at the Nativity.

I learned that this elderly man had dementia. Every time this family came, he would sit and hum. His sons mentioned that our house was the only place he would hum, sing and smile, as if he was revisiting a happy place in his memory. I learned that the family couldn't afford a wheelchair, so they carried their father everywhere. I couldn't hold back my tears and had to walk away for a moment.

So many people stepped onto our property at Christmastime, every kind of person. A solo parent with

his children, a young single pregnant mother, a widow, a family in grief, a military sergeant who was homesick, children without parents living with extended family and many others. They came for the lights yes, but the author of pure light is the Saviour. They came for hope, comfort and peace, gifts of the Saviour.

Although I am not a decorator like my dad, something that his actions made me mindful of is the gift of time and acts of service. I am a product of both these things because of the examples of my parents. Many of the little things they did were time consuming and many times I would tell them they were wasting time.

Our Christmas traditions were a consistent reminder to me that little things were never a waste of time when it came to bringing the spirit of Christ to others.

If I am not out of the country for the holidays, I spend that time with my charities. We plan the Christmas meals, make up food parcels, and deliver them to the community. I make jars of chutney, relishes and jams and deliver them to the recipients on my list, all while the voice of the prophets or the Tabernacle Choir can be heard in the background. There are places I go to for the sake of being in and around the radiance of lights. My best friend and I watch "The Nativity" every year. Although he is not a member, it is now a tradition

of his, and he looks forward to it just as much as I do.

What does it mean to wish someone a merry Christmas from the bottom of my heart?

For me, it is a verb, and it is a series of consistent actions. It is not just a line from a Christmas carol. It is showing others how much they are valued. It is going out of my way repeatedly for others. It is creating a space within myself, or in a shared environment to convey to them what pure love is. Since I still have a lot to learn about pure love, the best I can do is show others the spirit of Christ through time and service.

Preparing for Christmas by Caring and Sharing

Perth, Australia Southern River Stake

Thousands of Australian children will not receive a gift in the upcoming

December holiday season simply 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 (aged from 18 years onwards) 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 their 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



Sisters from the Australia Southern River Stake

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.

Giving to Others is the Gift we Give to Him

Tania Numia

With 14 in my family, it was difficult to get presents. I remember our presents being simple: a balloon and a bag of lollies to share and we were all happy.

Being together as a family was the gift we shared. On Christmas Eve we would get together and share food, play games like cricket or volleyball or have a dance.

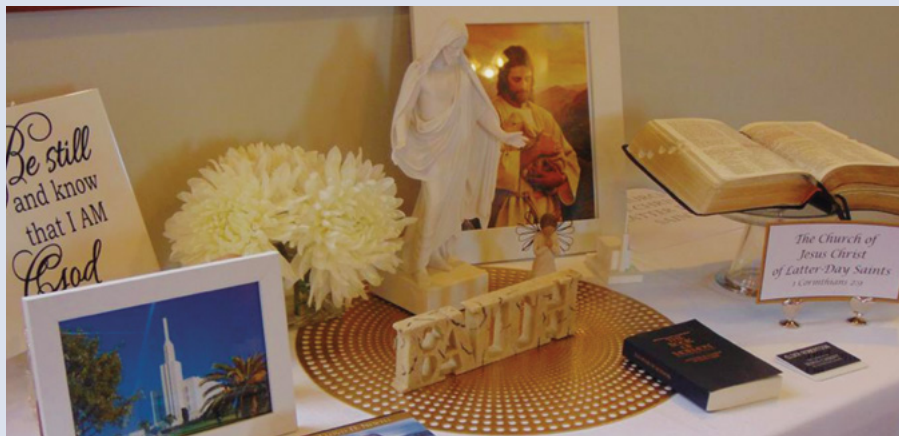
Christmas is the time when we should be the most caring and willing to share. It’s a time to love one another. My parents always taught us that even if we don’t have enough food ourselves, we can still give a little to those who are in need to show our love for Jesus. That is what he wants. That is the gift we can give him.

Every Christmas we have our Christmas tradition. We get together



and say a prayer. We talk about the true meaning of Christmas. This is a special time for us. I remember when I was young, learning about how Jesus was born in a lowly place, a stable with no bed and no wealth but, He is the Son of God. I learned that wealth means nothing to God.

Even now I know that we don’t need to be rich to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. What matters is that we show love to one another in whatever way we can. I make sure that my family and I share our blessings with family and friends around us. Anything we have we share whether it is a lot or a little. ■



the Flowers in Praise community under the direction of Hastings mayor, Sandra Hazlehurst.

Ten exhibitors from a range of religious groups had exhibitions of symbols relating to their faith and beliefs at the Wesley Methodist Church in Hastings on 14 and 15 September.

A gold coin donation was the entry for the exhibition and proceeds were presented to the Hastings St. John's Ambulance at the civic service.

The festival culminated in a colourful and captivating interfaith civic service, with music, mihi, call to prayer, prayers in multiple languages, dance, a rousing Samoan choir, reciting of holy texts, and sharing of inspirational messages from civic and religious leaders.

Participants and speakers included individuals from a range of cultural and faith-based groups.

Organiser Dorothy Brooker of the Hawke's Bay Interfaith Council was grateful to everyone who participated.

"I would like to thank the faith communities for being willing to share their faith so beautifully," she said.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was represented by President Paul McKee of the Hastings Stake, Bishop Leutele from the Napier Ward (congregation), along with several others from the Church.

President McKee said, "I came away from the interfaith service with a confirmation that we are all God's children and that we need to respect each other's faiths."

"As we develop a greater understanding of each other's beliefs, we realise that everybody wants to achieve the same outcomes—a closer relationship with God and a greater love and understanding of each other in the community." ■

Blossoming Interfaith Relations in Hastings, New Zealand

Newsroom

Representatives from several faiths join together to celebrate the start of spring.

The annual Hastings Flowers in Praise event was replaced this year by the Blossom Festival Interfaith Exhibition, part of the Hastings District Council annual

blossom festival celebrating the arrival of spring.

The theme for this year was "symbols of faith."

The event, which highlighted the diversity of the religious groups involved, was planned by Hawke's Bay Interfaith and

Apostle Addresses Pacific Area Staff and Volunteers

Newsroom

Elder Gary E. Stevenson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spoke on Friday 20 September to employees and missionaries who work in the Church's Pacific Area Administration Office in Auckland.

Elder Carl B. Cook of the Presidency of the Seventy and Bishop W. Christopher Waddell of the Presiding Bishopric also spoke at the morning devotional.

"It is a natural thing for us to look heavenward," Elder Stevenson said. He noted that every civilization from ancient times has tried to look heavenward for direction and guidance.

"We are blessed to have the framework to do that, in the name of Jesus Christ."

He added, "We love and respect our brothers and sisters in other religions," noting the good works and strong devotion many have to deity.

Elder Stevenson said that through a prophet of God, President Russell M. Nelson, "we receive revelation today."

"Revelation comes in the form of commandments. Obedience to

commandments brings blessings, and blessings bring happiness," he said.

"The Lord wants us to be happy."

He concluded by bearing his special witness of the Saviour Jesus Christ. He testified that "there is a God in heaven, we are His children, and He wants us all to return to be with Him."

He declared that "through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can return to the presence of God."

Elder Cook and his wife, Lynette, lived for three years in New Zealand when he was president of the Church's New Zealand Auckland Mission.

He reminded those in attendance that "we have a responsibility to lift and help others."

Bishop Waddell noted that we live in a time of change in the world, including in the Church.

"The Lord is aware of these changes," he said. "As we stay close to the Lord, we can trust that these changes will be for our good and our benefit."

Also attending the devotional were members of the Church's Pacific Area Presidency, Elder Ian S. Ardern, Elder K. Brett Nattress and Elder Kazuhiko Yamashita. ■



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