

## AREA PRESIDENCY MESSAGE

# Increasing Faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement

By Elder Kevin S. Hamilton  
President, Africa Southeast Area



Kevin S. Hamilton

One of the three priorities in the Africa Southeast Area plan for 2017 is to “increase faith in Heavenly Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Atonement.” But what exactly does this mean? How do we increase faith in Jesus Christ, and what exactly is His Atonement? Let me try to address these three questions, one at a time:

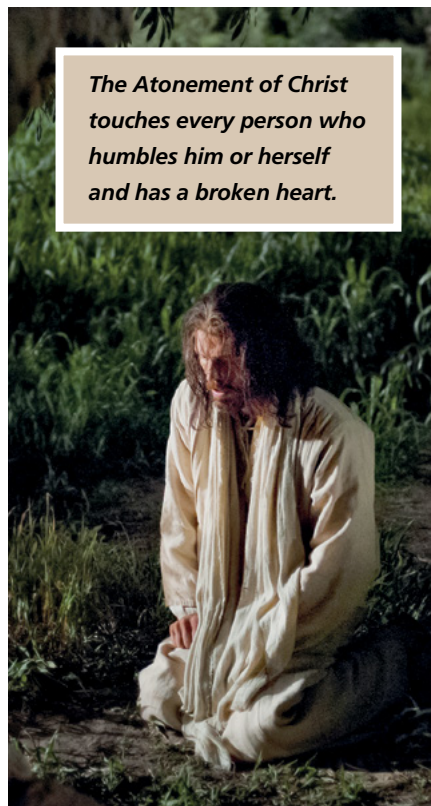
- How do I increase faith in Jesus Christ?
- What is the Atonement of Jesus Christ?
- How do I increase my faith in the Atonement?

### How do I increase faith in Jesus Christ?

Faith in Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Elder David A. Bednar has taught that “true faith is focused in and on the Lord and always leads to righteous action. ‘Faith [in Christ is] the first principle in revealed religion, . . . the foundation of all righteousness, . . . and the principle of action in all intelligent beings.’<sup>1</sup> Because acting in accordance with the correct principles the Redeemer proclaimed is central to receiving and exercising true faith, ‘faith without

works is dead.’<sup>2</sup> We are to be ‘doers of the word, and not hearers only.’<sup>3+4</sup>”

From Elder Bednar we learn that true faith requires that we focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and that we act in faith. In other words, we do what He asks us to do. As we act in faith, we receive increased faith. As Moroni taught in the Book of Mormon, “You receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.”<sup>5</sup>



*The Atonement of Christ touches every person who humbles him or herself and has a broken heart.*

### What is the Atonement of Jesus Christ?

From the Guide to the Scriptures, we start with this definition:

“To atone is to suffer the penalty for an act of sin, thereby removing the effects of sin from the repentant sinner and allowing him to be reconciled to God. Jesus Christ was the only one capable of making a perfect atonement for all mankind. He was able to do so because of His selection and foreordination in the Grand Council before the world was formed (Ether 3:14; Moses 4:1–2; Abraham 3:27), his divine Sonship, and his sinless life. His atonement included his suffering for the sins of mankind in the Garden of Gethsemane, the shedding of his blood, and his death and subsequent resurrection from the grave (Isaiah 53:3–12; Mosiah 3:5–11; Alma 7:10–13).”

The Atonement of Jesus Christ, then, is the process by which Jesus Christ suffered for our sins so that we might not have to pay the full price. It began in the Garden of Gethsemane, continued on the cross at Calvary, and culminated with His Resurrection.

The Atonement of Christ touches every person who humbles him or herself and has a broken heart. No one

is beyond the reach of the Atonement of Christ. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said: “However many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made . . . , I testify that you have *not* traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ’s Atonement shines.”<sup>6</sup>

### **How do I increase my faith in the Atonement?**

Sister Julia Mavimbela joined the Church in 1981 as one of the pioneers of the Church in Soweto, South Africa. She had been a widow for many years after her husband, John, was killed in a head-on collision when another car drifted into his lane. Unfortunately, as a black man in racially divided 1955 South Africa, he was blamed for the

accident. This caused great bitterness in the heart of Sister Mavimbela as she felt the burden of racial injustice.

In 1976 her hometown of Soweto was wracked with violent riots, and many lives were lost. Sister Mavimbela said of that time, “I knew that I was still bitter over my husband’s death, but I also knew where I was and that perhaps the Lord could use me.” So she started a gardening project for the youth in Soweto to help them to see that good things could grow in Soweto. She taught them lessons from nature and would say to them, “Let us take the soil of bitterness, throw in a seed of love, and see what fruits it can give us.”

During the time of the riots, she met two young missionaries and invited them into her home. She felt that they were messengers from God. The missionaries learned of the death of her husband some 25 years earlier, and they taught her the plan of salvation, especially the doctrine of baptism for the dead. They taught her that she and her husband could be sealed together for eternity in the temple. She was touched by the Spirit and was subsequently baptized and confirmed a member of the Church.

This marked a turning point in her long spiritual journey, and Julia became an influential early black member of the Church in her Soweto branch. She was always teaching and lifting other new members as she helped them to become future leaders in the Church.

One such leader is the current Soweto stake president, Thabo Lebethoa. Of Sister Mavimbela he says, “I never sensed any bitterness in her. I sensed somebody who was filled with hope for the future, a hope that the gospel would make a difference in the lives of the . . . people of Soweto.”

Near the end of her life, Sister Julia Mavimbela said this: “The Church is true. It has changed me from being bitter to loving other people. It has made me to understand that we are all children of our Heavenly Father.”<sup>7</sup>

Through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, Sister Mavimbela’s bitterness and despair were “swept away.”<sup>8</sup> The Atonement of Jesus Christ, accessed through the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, can heal hearts, bind up wounds, and wipe away tears. It is through increased faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement that we can be healed.

Elder David A. Bednar, has said, “Most of us clearly understand that the Atonement is for sinners. I am not so sure, however, that we know and understand that the Atonement is also for saints. . . . The Atonement provides help for us to overcome and avoid bad and to do and become good.”<sup>9</sup>

We increase faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement as we humble ourselves and call upon God. We increase our faith as we rely on His promises and ask for His enabling grace. We increase our faith in Jesus



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Christ and His Atonement as we come to believe that he is mighty to save and that we can trust in Him.

This Easter season, I pray that we might all move forward in faith, even increased faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. ■

#### NOTES

1. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 1.
2. James 2:20.
3. James 1:22.
4. David A. Bednar, "If Ye Had Known Me," *Liahona* or *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 102.
5. Ether 12:6.
6. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Laborers in the Vineyard," *Liahona* or *Ensign*, May 2012, 33.
7. This story is taken from a Church History video on the life of Sister Julia Mavimbela containing interviews with her and her family. Her story will also be featured in the July 2017 issue of the *Liahona*.
8. Enos 1:6.
9. David A. Bednar, "The Atonement and the Journey of Mortality," *Ensign*, Apr. 2012, 42; *Liahona*, Apr. 2012, 14.



#### LOCAL PRIESTHOOD LEADERS

## He Will Never Forget Me

By Elder Tasara Makasi

Area Seventy

Some of my greatest spiritual experiences have come from visiting less-active members. I have had the privilege of learning from them, and as a result my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been strengthened. When I engage in the rescue, I feel the Saviour's love more abundantly as my understanding and gratitude for His Atonement is increased. I leave each visit with a clearer vision of His work and His glory.

Recently, three fellow priesthood holders and I were in the home of a mother who was the head of the household and caring for at least four children. After a brief visit, one of my colleagues asked this matriarch to share her favourite hymn. Without hesitation she responded with "Come, Ye Children of the Lord." They had not attended church for years, and we asked if we could sing that hymn for

the family. Her face lit up as we sang, and the room reverberated with the beautiful words of the hymn. There were smiles on every face as the Spirit of the Lord filled the room. It was easy for us to invite this wonderful family back to church and share with them how our Savior wants them to return.

In another city we were in the home of a less-active young man named Melusi Ngwenya. He was



Tasara Makasi



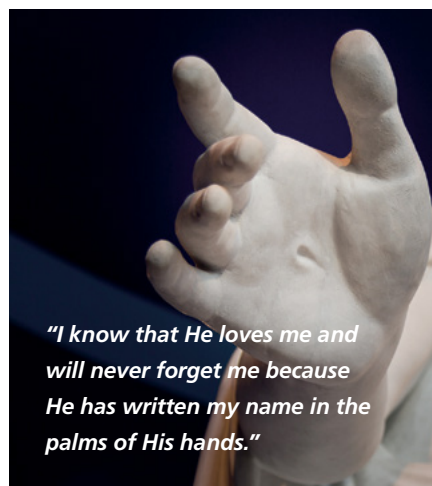
busy writing exams, and he gladly accepted when we asked him if he would like a blessing. Joining us on that visit was a seminary friend of Melusi's. This inspired friend reminded Melusi of the good questions he would ask in class and that his participation had inspired and helped other students. His big smile suggested that he had no idea that he had positively impacted anyone.

As we were leaving Melusi's home- stead, we stopped by his pigeon house and noticed that there were 10 birds inside and the cage door was open. We asked why he leaves the door open and if the birds ever fly away. With another big smile he responded, "They always come back; they know there is food and water here and that it is home." He then told us that he actually had about 50 pigeons and the rest would return that evening.

As we left this young man, his words "they always come back; they know it is home" did not leave my mind. I thought of the Church as the shelter, with food, water, and safety. Some may wander at times and pursue strange and forbidden paths, but

when we have eyes that see and ears that hear, we return to partake of the living water and bread of life and the embrace of our Savior. We then realize that "His hand is stretched out still" (2 Nephi 19:17), beckoning us to come unto Him that we may "have eternal life" (3 Nephi 9:14). I was reminded again of my responsibility to make it easier for any who may have strayed to come back through loving them and not judging them.

A third visit involved myself, the bishop, and another colleague. We entered the home of an active member and grandmother who was caring for at least 10 less-active children and



*"I know that He loves me and will never forget me because He has written my name in the palms of His hands."*

young adults. After we got acquainted, I invited them to share their favourite scriptures. Diana promptly replied that Jeremiah 29:11 was a meaningful scripture to her. (This is a beautiful scripture and not often quoted.) I asked her why she loved this scripture, and she explained that it reminds her that the Lord loves her. She then paraphrased Isaiah 49:16, saying, "I know that He loves me and will never forget me because He has written my name in the palms of His hands."

I will not forget this sweet experience with Diana and her scriptures. We took this opportunity to discuss our need to remember Him. We spoke of the blessing of partaking the sacrament every week as one way of remembering Him. We highlighted the significance of the promise, "If ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:7).

Melusi and the two families we visited are once again actively participating in church. Elder Mervyn B. Arnold of the Seventy said, "As we go to the rescue, God gives us power, encouragement, and blessings" ("To the Rescue: We Can Do It," Apr. 2016 general conference). I have learned that we will receive help and inspiration when we are on the Lord's errand. We surely do not go alone when we go to rescue His children. He has indeed graven us upon the palms of His hands and will therefore never forget any of His children. ■

## LOCAL NEWS

# An Apostle Touches Lives and Hearts in Africa

By Sean Donnelly

Director of Public Affairs ASEA

In November 2016, an Apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, accompanied by his wife, Katherine, visited four countries and spoke at 15 meetings to thousands of excited members. He arrived in central Africa and visited the Republic of the Congo, followed by Cameroon, then South Africa and Botswana.

Accompanying the Christoffersons were the Africa Southeast Area Presidency and their wives, plus Elder Soares, who served previously in the ASEA and who is currently a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, and his wife.

Elder Christofferson taught with great power and shared his testimony. During a meeting of members in Centurion, he said, “I know Him, and I know He lives by my own experience; I can say that He is the head of the Church. He leads it Himself. He is active in His leadership”.

Everywhere, Elder Christofferson greeted members, especially the children and the youth, and left his apostolic blessing: “I bless you that



*Many Saints eagerly awaited Elder Christofferson in Yaoundé, Cameroon; for most it was the first time to see an Apostle of the Lord in person.*



*Elder Christofferson greeted the members with a big handshake and a warm smile.*



*Everywhere Elder Christofferson went, he obliged the excited members by greeting them and allowing photos, many of which were selfies.*



*When Elder Christofferson arrived at the Soweto stake conference, there were over 1,600 members in attendance.*

your faith may grow, that you can endure what you must, that you can change what you need to change, that He may reign in your house and that you will have joy, that He will answer your prayers and that the influence of the adversary will be curtailed.”

Later, when Elder Christofferson posted on Instagram and Facebook, he said, “It is very clear to me that the people of Africa are spiritually inclined. They believe in God, and they naturally look to Him for help. Their desire to attend the temple is an inspiration to me.” ■



*From left: Elders Palmer, Soares, Christofferson, Hamilton, Ellis, and their wives.*

## Africa Southeast Area's 50th Stake Created

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has shown incredible growth in Africa. The Church's first presence in Zimbabwe was in 1931, with the first missionaries being sent to Rhodesia in 1935. Its first stake was organized in 1999 in Harare, the second in 2005 in Bulawayo, and now there are seven stakes in Zimbabwe.

Elder Kevin S. Hamilton, President of the Africa Southeast Area, presided

over the Harare stake conference proceedings held in Harare, Zimbabwe, and announced the creation of the new stake. In the reorganization of the stake, two stakes were created: the Harare Stake and the Harare East Stake. This new stake became the Africa Southeast Area's 50th stake.

Over 1,600 members gathered to learn from the spiritual messages and

to hear the announcement. Boundaries were changed for the Harare stake and the mission district to accommodate the new stake's units.

Harare stake leadership change saw the release of President Albert Mutariswa, with the new presidency sustained as follows: President Sawman Machakaire, first counsellor Robert Spencer, and second counsellor Onward Chivunga. There are four wards and three branches in the new stake.

The newly formed Harare East Stake leadership consists of President Ignatius Maziofa, Terrify Banda as first counsellor, and Edward Gramu as second counsellor. This stake consists of five wards and three branches.

"What makes men worthy to serve as leaders in a stake?" asked Elder Hamilton. "They should be living the principles of the gospel and keeping their covenants and commitments in the Church. They should be taking care of their families and teaching them correct principles. They should be honouring their priesthood callings and be worthy to enter the temple. They should be full-tithe payers and obeying the Word of Wisdom. After the interviewing and seeking the Lord's will, it was evident whom He had chosen to lead these two stakes at this time." ■



***Elder Kevin S. Hamilton, Africa Southeast Area President, Brother Robert Spencer and his wife, President Sawman Machakaire and his wife, Elder Walter Chatora, Area Seventy, and Brother Onward Chivunga and his wife.***



***Elder Kevin S. Hamilton, Area President, President Ignatius Maziofa and his wife, Brother Terrify Banda and his wife, Brother Edward Gramu and his wife, Elder Walter Chatora, Area Seventy.***

# The Snake and the Holy Ghost

By Valerie Keuning

It was a lovely, warm spring day, and the older children were enjoying a short holiday from school. They were restless and wanted to do a bit more than simply play in the garden. So, gathering them all together, I promised that when the daily household chores were completed, we could all take a walk to the river, which was fairly close to where we lived.

It didn't take long, and soon we were all ready for our walk. The baby of the family was in his pram and off we went. What excitement! The five older children, laughing and playing together, ran ahead. They were loving the freedom and having fun outdoors. It was a family rule that as long as I could see them at all times, they could relax and enjoy themselves.

As we all walked along towards the river path, I started to feel uneasy. I had a prompting that I should call the children together and tell them that they should walk behind me and not run ahead. I felt it rather strange that I should feel this way, but even though the children groaned and complained somewhat, I insisted. So there we were with me leading the family and still trying to enjoy the walk.

Then I had another prompting which was almost like a still, quiet



*The family of Valerie Keuning preparing for a peaceful springtime walk.*

voice which said, "Pull the pram. Don't push it". I found this very bewildering—after all, who pulled a pram behind them when it is meant to be pushed? But the feeling became so strong that I obeyed. By now the children were very confused as well. This was meant to be a fun river walk. Why should they all walk behind Mom, and why was I pulling the pram behind me?



*The older children, laughing and playing together, ran ahead. They were loving the freedom and having fun outdoors.*

We continued our walk, and I remember trying to distract the children by pointing out the birds and the beauties of nature around us—when all they really wanted to do was surge ahead and explore on their own.

We soon came to a bend in the river path, and as I walked around the bend, I stopped myself just in time. Right there in front of me was a huge snake all curled up enjoying the warmth of the lovely spring day. I gasped in fright but did not panic, which was unusual for me because I am quite quick to do just that! I quietly told the children to stand perfectly still and then directed them to take an alternative route away from the snake. With big eyes and feeling rather frightened, they obeyed, and soon the snake incident was behind us and we continued to have a pleasant and enjoyable walk. The children ran around freely, had huge fun playing games and enjoying being outdoors.

I offered up a silent prayer to my Heavenly Father for His protecting love and care, as I now knew why I had received those promptings I had earlier thought so strange. Had I not been obedient and in tune with the Spirit, who knows what could have happened to any one of the children. If we stay faithful and live worthily, we can all enjoy the closeness of the Holy Ghost guiding and directing our paths in life. ■

# How Members Keep the Sabbath Day Holy in Swakopmund

Swakopmund is a city on the coast of western Namibia 280 km (170 miles) west of Windhoek, Namibia’s capital. The town has 44,725 inhabitants and is situated in the Namib Desert. It was founded in 1892 as the main harbour for German South–West Africa, and a small part of its population is still German-speaking today.

There are 50 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Swakopmund, and they were recently assigned two missionaries, which pleased the members very much. They love the Sabbath day and find delight in it. Isaiah spoke of it in chapter 58, verses 13–14:

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

“Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

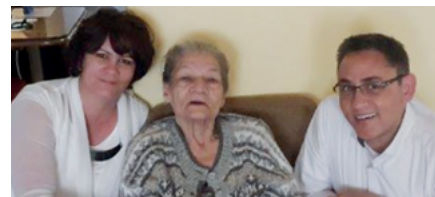
The branch president, Hans Noble, visits elderly relatives on the Sabbath with his wife, Dorothy. He says, “Sunday is a very special time for

me. It allows me to think and ponder about the Saviour’s love and His Atonement and helps me to share His love with my loved ones.”

Sister Dorothy Noble teaches the youth and shared her testimony of the Sabbath: “The Sabbath day is very special to me. It is the day that I can rest from my daily labours and renew my baptismal covenants with my Heavenly Father, read my scriptures, prepare my lessons and really ponder them. On the Sabbath day I love to worship my Lord and sing praises unto Him.”

Another member of the branch, Sister Hercules, said: “We enjoy sharing the scriptures with our friends. I love the Sabbath day because it helps me to ponder about our Saviour Jesus Christ’s Atonement and His love for the children. By teaching in Primary, I feel very close to our Saviour.”

The Sabbath day is important to the members of the Swakopmund Branch. They strive to remain faithful in observing that day and in attending church to partake of the sacrament weekly. Fourteen of them from that small branch visited the Johannesburg South Africa Temple in December 2016. Keeping the Sabbath day holy has blessed them spiritually and helped them remain righteous as they remember the Lord on His day. ■



*President and Sister Noble visit relatives and home teach on the Sabbath day.*



*The Ngundaja family love to attend church on the Sabbath day because it is their best family time together.*



*The Hercules family reads scriptures with friends, and Sister Hercules teaches in Primary.*