

AUSTRALIA LOCAL PAGES

AREA LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

What Are the Vision and Priorities of the Lord for Me and My Family?

By Elder Johnny L. Leota

Area Seventy

When our family received the challenge to embrace the vision and prophetic priorities of the Pacific Area plan,¹ we prayerfully reviewed and pondered these for our family and for ourselves. We felt the inspiration of the Lord and began to discuss and record our family goals pertaining to each priority.

As we pondered the priority to “increase [our] spiritual and temporal self-reliance” and the accompanying goal of “continuing to seek learning and education by faith,” we felt impressed to change the way we studied the scriptures as a family. We decided that we would read from the Book of Mormon together on the Sabbath, but on the other days of the week we would read and study an assigned chapter on our own and gather together the following day to share and discuss our insights and impressions with one another.

Each day as we gathered for our scripture study, we would begin with an opening prayer and then one by one we would share the beautiful gems collected in our personal study. We would often come away feeling uplifted and edified. We would often feel a little closer to one another. We felt an added strength in our testimonies and a greater

commitment to and love for Heavenly Father and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Studying the scriptures individually in preparation for the next day’s family scripture study has been a delight for me. I have enjoyed pondering particular verses that impressed me; other thoughts and insights have pricked my mind and opened the eyes of my understanding, accompanied by a warm assurance of the Spirit, confirming truth.

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma taught his son Helaman:

“By small and simple things are great things brought to pass; and small means in many instances doth confound the wise.

“. . . The Lord God doth work by means to bring about his great and



Elder Johnny L. Leota



eternal purposes; and by very small means the Lord doth confound the wise and bringeth about the salvation of many souls.”²

I believe the “small means”, as described by Alma, are the vision and priorities found in the Pacific Area plan. One of the “small and simple things” for my family was a whisper of the Spirit on how to increase our spiritual and temporal self-reliance by considering another way of studying the scriptures together. My faith and trust in Heavenly Father and in Jesus Christ and His Atonement have increased, and this study approach continues to strengthen me and my family.

We have been reminded by President Thomas S. Monson that “we live in a time of great trouble and wickedness.” He then posed a very important question: “What will protect us from the sin and evil so prevalent in the world today?” He knowingly answered, “I maintain that a strong testimony of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of His gospel will help see us through to safety.”³

President Monson has implored each of us “to prayerfully study and ponder the Book of Mormon each day. As we do so, we will be in a

position to hear the voice of the Spirit, resist temptation, to overcome doubt and fear, and to receive heaven's help in our lives."⁴

I testify that the vision and the prophetic priorities found in the Pacific Area plan are from those whom we sustain as prophets, seers and revelators.

Be inspired about the vision and priorities of the Lord for you and your family. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee. . . .

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profit may appear to all.

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."⁵

Use the spiritual gifts that God has blessed you with to receive inspiration and revelation for your family and prepare yourselves for the greatest gift that our Heavenly Father has prepared for the righteous, even eternal life.⁶ ■

NOTES

1. See 2017 Pacific Area Plan. The stated vision of the plan is to "strengthen families and individuals by increasing faith and trust in Heavenly Father and in Jesus Christ and His Atonement." Its prophetic priorities are to "honour the Sabbath," "increase spiritual and temporal self-reliance," "hasten the work of salvation," and "seek the blessings of the temple."
2. Alma 37:6-7.
3. Thomas S. Monson, "The Power of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, May 2017, 86.
4. Thomas S. Monson, "The Power of the Book of Mormon," 87.
5. 1 Timothy 4:14-16.
6. See Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.



Clockwise from top: AFL footballer Stephen Lawrence, stake president Ashley Parton, mission president Peter Vidmar, and Elder Elijah Smiler

LOCAL PAGES

Sports Heroes Inspire Youth

By Mormon Newsroom

More than six hundred youth, their parents and their leaders from all over Victoria and southern New South Wales gathered together earlier this year to listen to their sports heroes.

Speakers included former AFL footballer Stephen Lawrence; dual gold Olympic medallist Peter Vidmar, who is currently serving as mission president in Melbourne; and 18-year-old Elder Elijah Smiler, who is a full-time missionary in the Australia Melbourne Mission.

It was for a regional devotional held at the Heidelberg chapel. The devotional capped off an exciting few days for youth as they participated in a regional youth basketball competition.

As a man of faith, Stephen Lawrence shared a number of experiences from his twelve-year career with the Hawthorn Football Club. On one occasion, he was with all of his Hawthorn teammates traveling on a team bus when a pornographic movie began playing. Despite the ridicule that he

was sure he would get from his teammates, he requested that the movie be stopped. To his great surprise, no one said anything to him at the time, but many years later one of his former teammates confided that he viewed that experience as one of the greatest examples of courage he had ever seen. He told of how he had shared that experience with thousands of people as an example of courage and integrity.

Elder Smiler also shared examples of how as a young man representing New Zealand in international basketball competitions, he too was confronted with uncomfortable situations that challenged his values. He found that when he stayed true to his values, his decisions were vindicated and it gave others the strength to follow as well.

President Vidmar taught, "There are times when we need to take a stand, and sometimes it's uncomfortable. There is nothing in the scriptures that says keeping the commandments will be quick,

fun and easy. Sometimes it's awkward, uncomfortable and embarrassing”.

He added that the main reason he felt he could stay true to the standards of keeping the Sabbath day holy and following the Church's health code, the Word of Wisdom, was that “I had already made those decisions long before that moment of truth”.

He further added that “we need to make decisions now about who we want to be and who we want to become so that as we get older it's easy to say no to the things that will get us off track and say yes to the things that will keep us on track.” ■

Saints Respond to Winter Appeal

By Mormon Newsroom

The plight of the homeless in Perth may be dire during the cold, wet winter months. A worrying trend in recent years is seeing several homeless women and children as well as many homeless men on the streets, according to Sister Michelle Dunlop, who initiated the Street Friends volunteer group some years ago to ease the plight of the homeless in Perth CBD.

An appeal was made to members of her ward for used items that were no longer needed but which would be gratefully accepted by the homeless,

such as blankets, pillows, jumpers, parkas, jackets, socks, shoes, backpacks, sleeping bags, towels and even handbags filled with toiletries.

The appeal was launched earlier this May and ran for four weeks. It brought a phenomenal response in the month it ran: 47 garbage bin-liner-sized bags full of donated items. The young men and women of the Madeley Ward then met at the end of June to sort out and separate all donated items and to re-bag them for easy distribution to the homeless.

Arrangements were made with Michelle to collect the re-bagged

items on Tuesday, 4 July. Jade Kendell from the Relief Society of the Ellenbrook congregation and Annette Tupaea from the Relief Society of the Madeley Ward supervised the loading of the bags into a transit van. Church members will further assist with the distribution of the items to the homeless with Street Friends and other homeless support groups.

Michelle described the response to the winter appeal as “overwhelming”, saying, “What a difference this will make to so many lives living such a hard life on the streets!” ■



↑ Young women sort through donations.

↓ Saints load donations into the van.



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Government Honours Mother for Service

By Mormon Newsroom

Mum Deidre Triffitt has been honoured for her tireless work establishing the Giant Steps range of services for children on the autism spectrum. She is included on the Tasmanian Honour Roll of Women.

"Whilst I was the one recognised with this award, it was a family affair," she said.

In Deidre's invitation letter, Tasmanian Minister for Women the Hon. Jacque Petrusma MP stated that the honour roll was established to recognise the outstanding contributions made by Tasmanian women from all walks of life. The award caps decades of Triffitt family sacrifice that has benefited many families in the wider community.

In 1987, Deidre was a hardworking dairy farmer's wife and mother of three boys (a daughter would soon arrive), when her youngest son, 14-month-old Corom, started experiencing epileptic seizures up to 15 times a day, eventually developing self-harming, destructive behaviour. A Sydney specialist diagnosed Corom with autism and told the devastated parents, "Don't waste your time. He'll get physically and mentally worse; he'll be a 'vegetable' and should be institutionalized".

"Not on my watch", was Deidre's unspoken response. However, there was



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Mum Deidre Triffitt has been honoured for her tireless work establishing the Giant Steps range of services for children on the autism spectrum.

little financial support and no specific services for autistic children in Tasmania.

Deidre and her husband, Kim, commenced a worldwide search to find help for their son. Over the next four years they spent \$300,000 of their own funds, made many trips to the USA and Canada—at times with Kim at home alone in Tasmania working the farm—and investigated several successful but prohibitively expensive programmes before their persistence eventually paid off.

Darlene Berringer, the founder of the Canadian Institute of Neuro-Integrative Development's Giant Steps programme, was so impressed with the parents' dedication to help their son, she offered one of the limited, highly-sought-after places at the institute's satellite school in Kamloops, British Columbia. For a year the entire family relocated to Canada while Corom attended the school, where he thrived in the intense, holistic, multi-disciplinary

environment. Deidre and Kim worked as the school's janitors to help pay for Corom's tuition.

It soon became apparent that with limited financial resources for the family to remain in Canada, such a school was needed back home in Tasmania. Having found the answer, another battle began—to set up Giant Steps in Deloraine, Tasmania.

Although there were many demands for a Giant Steps satellite school in the USA and other Canadian provinces, Darlene Berringer maintained her passionate support, making several trips to Tasmania while Deidre lobbied for assistance, founding the Giant Steps Steering Committee.

With a \$225,000 commitment from the Tasmanian State Government and extensive community involvement, Giant Steps Tasmania opened in July 1995 as the first satellite Giant Steps school outside Canada.

What started with a mother's love, a family's sacrifice, and friends' and community support now blesses the lives of people in Tasmania and abroad. Today Giant Steps is a non-profit, independent registered school and therapeutic centre serving 42 students.

Corom Triffitt is a happy young man who resides in his own independent unit on the farm, supported by carers and family, a far cry from the institutionalised future once predicted.

Kim Triffitt serves as the bishop of Deloraine Ward, and Deidre Triffitt serves as Faith in God activity day leader and ward music chairman. ■

Todd Hodgetts Prepares for His Next Competition

By Mormon Newsroom

Winning a gold medal in the F20 shot put at the 2012 London Paralympics was only the beginning for Todd Hodgetts.

He was a bronze medalist at last year's Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, and now he is off to London to participate again in the IPC World Championships, with a stopover in Brisbane for a "warmup practice" in the "Down Under" competition with the United States.

He is well-known to Australians in his sport, having received numerous awards. His interest in shot put began when he was ten and his brother brought home a shot put from school and urged him to try it as a kind of a joke. He soon developed a liking for the sport and progressed quickly. It was no joke.

He set his first state record in 2004 when he was 15 and made the national team in 2005. In 2008 he was the Australian champion in the shot put.

From 2009–2012 he won every event he competed in, including the 2012 Australian Athletics Championships, where he set a world record. This was followed by winning the gold medal in the 2012 London Paralympics in the men's F20 shot put.

Todd was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in the 2014 Australia Day Honours "for service to sport as a Gold Medallist at the London 2012 Paralympic Games". In 2015 he received the Athletics Australia Male



Todd Hodgetts is preparing for his next competition.



MORMON NEWSROOM

Para-Athlete of the Year award, and in 2016 the Victorian Institute of Sport Award of Excellence.

He claimed the gold again in 2015 in the Australian Uni Games and in the IPC Athletics World Championships in Doha, Qatar, where he again set a meet record with his throw of 15.83m. In February 2016 Todd threw a record 16.38m at the Briggs Athletics Classic in Hobart, breaking his world record of 16.24m for the men's F20 he had set in 2012.

Todd has been training at the prestigious Victorian Institute of Sport with new coach Scott Martin.

Asked what his expectations are for the coming championships in London, he replied, "I just want to do my best! I listen to my coach, keep focused every day, and give it my all".

He added, "I love doing this! It's been tough, but I'm not a quitter. I want to keep doing this until I'm forty! You've got to take every opportunity and enjoy what you're doing. I want to go out with no regrets. When I face my Maker someday, I just want to be able to say, 'I gave it 100 percent'".

Todd has an autism spectrum disorder but dislikes the term *disability*. "A better term would be 'special needs'. We are not disabled; we just have special needs," he says.

The newsroom would add, "He has unique and outstanding abilities, as well as an endearing personality. We wish Todd the best in his competitions this summer". ■



**Youth meet with
the Honourable
Elise Archer MP.**

MORMON NEWSROOM

Saints Host Evening with Politician

By Mormon Newsroom

Members of the Hobart Australia Stake recently hosted an informal dessert-and-conversation evening with local politician and first female Speaker of the Tasmanian House of Assembly the Honourable Elise Archer MP.

In a Church member's home, Latter-day Saints of varying ages mingled with Elise and enjoyed homemade crumble before hearing her speak about her roles and experiences in politics. It was then question-and-answer time where guests asked Elise anything they pleased.

Everyone left feeling more positive about politics and inspired to become involved in the community, and Elise became better acquainted with members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"I like that Elise was real with us and told us about the hard things and what she doesn't like so much about her job, as well as the

parts she enjoys," said guest Abby Grassham from the Hobart Ward.

"It was interesting hearing about what being an MP and Speaker entails and how she balances the two," she added.

Hobart stake public affairs director Lynda Vertigan, who organised the event, was also delighted. "I enjoyed the night because we turned our attention away from ourselves and learned a lot about how one person works and serves in the community.

"Elise is a responsible and independent-thinking woman who works hard to protect and improve our community. She's organised, thorough and hardworking. I really appreciated our youth being exposed to her enthusiasm and commitment. It was also a great opportunity for Elise to meet some of our many outstanding young people."

The Hobart stake public affairs committee is organizing more dessert-and-conversation evenings. ■

MISSIONARY MOMENTS

Surviving a Deadly Earthquake

By Terina Walker

The first earthquake hit at 9:30 pm. My companion and I were on the fifth floor doing daily planning, and all of a sudden the ground started shaking beneath us. All the appliances and shelves and my beloved rice cooker fell. Incredibly enough, no one got hurt. We grabbed everything we could and ran out the door.

The aftershocks had settled down the next day, so we carried on doing missionary work. We taught a lesson, went home, planned, then went to sleep. It was a normal night.

Suddenly we were being tossed around. I jumped up and hugged my companion tightly. It was unbelievable. All our furniture had already fallen over. We looked outside and it was pitch black. I could hear nothing but sirens blaring.

We jumped up and frantically made our way to the door. I tried to open it but it was jammed.

Yes, I was one of the missionaries affected by the Kumamoto earthquake that struck Japan. That night we felt the 7.3-magnitude earthquake hit our city and consequently heard the reports of the hundreds of people who had lost their lives or had been critically injured.

Outside was a devastating sight. There were people outside not

knowing what to do. I felt the desperation of the people. It was surreal. We came across a girl who was staring up at a building. She was crying and said her parents were stuck in the apartment. Luckily, after twenty minutes, her parents managed to escape. The traffic lights were down, and people were panicking, lining up with their cars at the gas station.

Members, friends, families and neighbours gathered at the chapel. All the water, power and gas had gone out in the neighborhood, so people from nearby came for shelter and safety. We were told another

earthquake was on its way, so we weren't allowed near any buildings. We huddled together in the car park.

I remember pleading with my Heavenly Father in prayer for comfort, safety and protection.

I felt saddened by the loss of so many lives, but the assurance that I received through prayer helped me remember that because we are all of great worth to our Father in Heaven, He has provided a way for us to find everlasting peace and happiness, no matter what happens in our lives. That is through our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is because of Him that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored and that family relationships can be perpetuated beyond the grave. It is because of our Savior that we, as



Some of the damage caused by the 7.3-magnitude earthquake

SUPPLIED BY TERINA



Terina Walker survived a deadly earthquake while serving in the Japan Fukuoka Mission.

SUPPLIED BY TERINA

President Russell M. Nelson said, “can feel joy regardless of what is happening—or not happening—in our lives. Joy comes from and because of Him. He is the source of all joy.”¹ I felt an overwhelming sense of peace and an assurance that everything was going to be all right.

After the earthquake, my companions and I decided to work even harder each day to find those prepared to hear the joyous message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We found many people who were humbled and ready to accept our message.

As I reflect on this experience, I feel privileged to have been a servant of the Lord in Japan.

Despite the magnitude of the earthquake, there was not one moment where I was scared or frightened. Faith overcame that. Hope overcame that. It truly is the gospel of Jesus Christ that brings peace and hope and joy and light to our lives. ■

Terina Walker is from Hamilton, New Zealand, and served in the Japan Fukuoka Mission from July 2015 to February 2017. She is currently in the Dinsdale Ward.

NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Joy and Spiritual Survival,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2016, 82.

LOCAL WEBSITES


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Greene Naoko Purcell is currently onstage in Melbourne in the Australia Disney production of Aladdin, which is enjoying sold-out performances.

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Strengthening Communities in Kiribati

LDS Charities volunteers support residents in construction of seawall. A group of residents with various disabilities who call themselves "Te Toa Matua" have chosen to settle in the community of Nankai in the Republic of Kiribati. The Australian High Commission offered to build a community hall for the residents, but with coastal erosion a factor, a seawall needs to be constructed first.

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