

# NEW ZEALAND 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



Elder Johnny L. Leota

When our family received the challenge to embrace the vision and prophetic priorities of the Pacific Area plan,<sup>1</sup> 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.

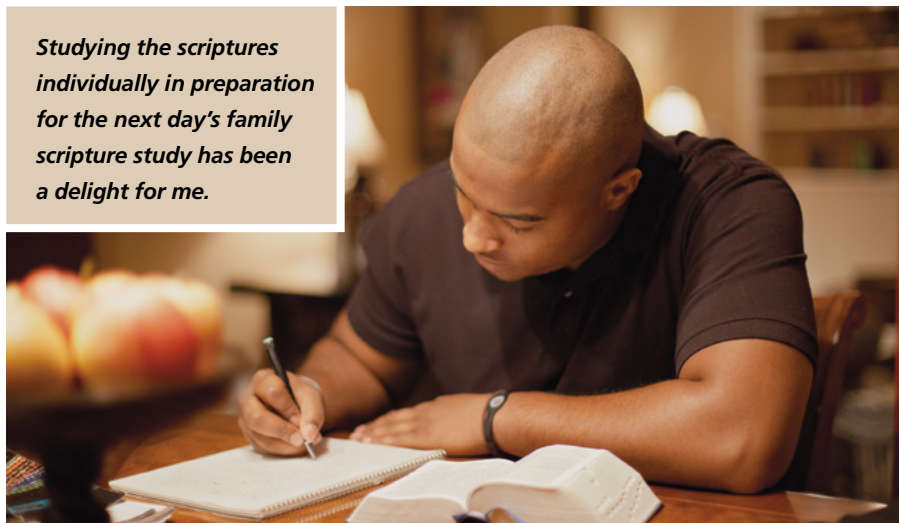
In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Alma taught his son Helaman:

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

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

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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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup>

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 profiting 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.”<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> ■

#### 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.

#### LOCAL PAGES

## Family Members Who Pray Together Graduate Together

By Mormon Newsroom

Therese Bourne, her brother Campbell Gin, and their niece Rosina Cowan all graduated from university on the same day.

Campbell said of graduation day, “Friday 5th May 2017 is a massive day for the Gin whanau. It was a celebration of achievement, hard work, diligence and the end of ‘student poverty’ for some of us.”

These three have a blend of Maori/Chinese ancestry and are children and a grandchild of Willie and Rangi Gin (both deceased).

Therese is a happily married mother of seven who has now achieved a lifelong dream—graduating with an advanced degree in psychology from the University of Waikato.

She wants everyone to know that if they persevere, they too can achieve their dreams.

Her dream to become a psychologist began at age 24, when she already had two children. With the love and support of her husband and the help of her supportive in-laws, who provided housing, babysitting and taxi service for their children, Therese enrolled in university, where she majored in psychology and education.

Shortly after beginning her university schooling, she and husband, Mangan, had their third child, requiring Therese to become a part-time student. Five years later she received a bachelor of arts degree in psychology and education.





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➤ *Therese, Campbell and Rosina with family and friends*  
➤ *Therese Bourne, her brother Campbell Gin and their niece Rosina Cowan all graduated from university on the same day.*

She chose that field of study because she wanted to help her second son, who has autism. She then completed her master of arts in education.

Although her higher education led to good job opportunities, she hadn't yet achieved her vocational desire, to work as a psychologist. When that opportunity didn't finally materialize, she determined to go back to school for an advanced degree in psychology.

Last year she registered as a psychologist, and she recently accepted a position with the Ministry of Education working as a psychologist.

Therese credits her Church experiences with her success as a student.

"When I started my studies, I was serving as president of the Young Women, and then I taught seminary. I loved teaching the youth and know my Church experiences helped me pass exams, complete assignments and understand concepts that would have been difficult without that extra-curricular activity."

She is also grateful for the love and support that she received from her wider whanau network, her husband, children, late father and all of her siblings and nieces and nephews, including her late brother, Wiremu Gin, all of whom (at different times) told her she could when she didn't think so.

She is very proud of the accomplishments of her youngest brother and niece.

Rosina, who also graduated with a bachelor's in education, is the third of nine children. She says that her grandfather was a significant influence in her life, crediting him with unwittingly moulding her decision to be a teacher. Indeed, he was a strong influence on all three graduates.

Of her grandfather, Rosina said, "[He] helped with my homework . . . I enjoyed his critical thoughts and many random questions about random things." In her second year of studies, Rosina came back to church—"I had learnt what life was without the gospel, and with it now in my life . . . it keeps me grounded in all aspects. But mostly I am happy that it is where I need and want to be." ■



*Thomas Swain  
is the founder of  
popular website  
Mission Geek.*

## Mission Geek's Secret to Success

By Shilo Kino

At its best, his website will attract over 180,000 visitors in one month.

Thomas Swain is the founder of Mission Geek, a popular website with the purpose to “help people get inspired to do missionary work”.

“There needed to be somewhere for young people to be inspired about mission work and at the time there wasn't anything. I noticed a lot of young people spent a lot of time online and on their phones. I thought, ‘Why not just go where they are?’”

Tom grew up in Stafford, England, and moved to New Zealand with his family when he was 18.

He is passionate about missionary work, having served a mission in the West Indies and having taught at the missionary training centre in New Zealand for five years.

“There's nothing better than helping someone realize their spiritual potential. It fuels this amazing desire

to figure out for themselves why they are here.”

Tom now has over 27,000 followers on Facebook and Instagram. But it wasn't always easy gaining his massive following.

He said he had no idea what he was doing when he first created Mission Geek. It was only after receiving multiple impressions that he decided to launch the website in 2014.

“I developed a website, a Facebook page, and then I looked for stories and made links with people.

“In 2015, I wanted to ditch the project because it was taking up too much time and it wasn't having much success,” he said.

“I was looking to study full time, but it would mean I would have to drop Mission Geek. I prayed and I got an impression to not take the course of study and develop Mission Geek. Twenty minutes later, I got a phone call from my aunty in France who is

not a member. She counselled me to do Mission Geek. I took that as a second confirmation.”

Mission Geek got its big break when Tom covered a story about a sister missionary in a car crash in Canberra, Australia.

“Mission Geek covered her entire journey all the way through to rehab. I realized there was an enormous power in people coming together to support a missionary. It included followers who went to visit the sister missionary in hospital. It also meant an enormous amount of people were reading articles about how to prepare for a mission, what to do on a mission and how to stay safe on a mission.”

Tom said Mission Geek has allowed people to share inspirational articles with friends and families and has also helped many members return to Church activity.

And he hopes Mission Geek will continue to be a source of motivation for anyone considering serving a mission.

“I hope it will be a place for people to come and stay focused waiting for your call, during those vulnerable moments, and a source of inspiration to keep going.” ■

**Mission Geek website:**  
[www.missiongeek.net](http://www.missiongeek.net)

**Mission Geek Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/themissiongeek](http://www.facebook.com/themissiongeek)



THOMAS SWAIN



*Tom hopes Mission Geek will continue to be a source of motivation.*

### Tom's five tips for starting an LDS blog

1. **Decide your theme.** Think about what is going to make your blog unique. I decided to write about missionary work because of my background experience, and it's something I'm passionate about.
2. **Don't be afraid.** Everyone is self-conscious and afraid to put themselves out there. Just be yourself. No one you admire or look up to is scared to put themselves out there; otherwise you wouldn't know who they are.
3. **Do something every day.** You don't have to post something every day, but at least write some ideas down, do research or do something related to your blog every day.
4. **Don't be a perfectionist.** People just want to hear your voice, so don't worry so much about structure and don't give yourself a hard time about spelling and grammar. Just get your stuff out there.
5. **Enlist the help of the Lord.** Pray to the Lord and pray for help when you write. Be open to the Spirit in terms of how you go about finding and publishing stories.

## Couples Prepare to Lead Missions around the World

By Mormon Newsroom

Three couples from New Zealand will lead hundreds of missionaries in different parts of the world.

President Michael J. Fermanis and Sister Raelinda Maxine Hemi Fermanis, from Porirua, will serve in the Philippines Manila Mission.

President John R. Higgins and Sister Naomi Grace Heperi Higgins, from Hamilton, will serve in the Fiji Suva Mission.

President Newman N. Soloai and Sister Luisa Kava Kavea 'Etuete, from Auckland, will serve in the New Zealand Wellington Mission.

Michael Fermanis has previously served in the Church as a bishop, a stake president, and an institute teacher and served his mission in Melbourne, Australia.

In his professional career, he was registrar of the Institute of Professional Engineers, New Zealand.

When asked about the reaction of his work associates when he announced his mission call, he said, "Some of them think I'm nuts!"

He added, "My boss, when I told him that I would be leaving, was very disappointed. And he said, 'Why would you throw your career away like this?'"

"I replied, 'If it wasn't true, it would be easy [to turn the call down], but it's true, and so I have to do what's right.' He understood."

As parents of seven children—six boys and one girl—the couple feel



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*Among the married couples preparing to lead missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints around the world, starting in July, are three couples from New Zealand.*



**President Michael J. Fermanis and Sister Raelinda Maxine Hemi Fermanis, from Porirua, will serve in the Philippines Manila Mission.**

very strongly about their family. They will be taking two of their seven children with them.

“We have a very close family,” President Fermanis said. “We meet every Sunday. All the children come together with the grandchildren, and so the boys are pretty sad about leaving their brothers.”

He continued, “Between the oldest and the youngest there are 16 years. But . . . they just love each other to death. They enjoy playing sport together. And so they are really going to miss each other. None of them have had any concerns about leaving their friends. It’s about leaving their brothers and their sister.”

When asked what his duties will be as a mission president, he said, “I’ve been told that I’m first a husband, then a father, then a mission president.

“Since being called, I’ve had bits of revelation that have come and areas of focus. There are 200 young men and women that I need to ensure that in 20, 30, 40 years’ time that they are still great members of the Church.” ■

## Working with Angels

By Irene A. Davies

As a temple and family history consultant and a researcher for 67 years, I have had many amazing spiritual experiences, including working with angels.

On one occasion as I talked to a friend in my ward, I was prompted to ask if she had worked on her family tree. She replied that she was trying to find information about her grandmother but that neither she nor anyone in her family knew much about her origins.

I offered to help her to find the information about that ancestor, and



**Irene A. Davies has been a temple and family history consultant and researcher for 67 years.**

she was overjoyed. An appointment was made for her to come to my home the following Monday.

At first, we talked about traditional stories handed down in her family through the years, which consisted of the following stories:

1. The grandmother was supposedly born to an Anglican bishop of Australia.
2. She married in New South Wales, Australia. My friend had a certificate for this marriage which she had obtained.
3. A person by the name of Henrietta Sparling was spoken of in the family.
4. Her grandmother was born out of wedlock.
5. Her grandmother was buried somewhere in the Wellington area. Only an approximate year was known. (She remembered taking care of her siblings while her parents went to the grandmother’s funeral).
6. Her grandmother was known as “Sunshine.”

This was my starting point. So, with much prayer, over the first few weeks I did my best to find her.

I found that the birth certificate specified only her adoptive mother’s name, and “Sunshine” was not mentioned. I also discovered a school record where she was listed as “Sunshine” Sparling on the school roll. I also found that the adoptive mother had been born in New South Wales and was not married.

## MISSIONARY MOMENTS

One day I was prompted to do an Australian records search in New South Wales. As I scrolled down through the records, I noticed there were many “Police Gazette” records. I decided to just scroll through quickly, because I did not think these would be very useful.

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, the screen just stopped scrolling down. As I looked closer, the cursor was at a New South Wales court case relating to a matter from Auckland, New Zealand.

The heading on the document was, “Baby foundling discovered”. As I read the article, it related to a baby that was left on the veranda of Agnes H. Sparling (the adoptive mother’s name) at an address in Auckland, New Zealand.

Tears began to roll down my cheeks and I felt a burning within my bosom as I searched through the details of the incident.

The article confirmed that this was the grandmother that we had been searching for. It gave a description of the child, the age and the clothing the baby was wearing.

The document gave the names of the birth father and mother and detailed the incident relating to the abandonment of the child. The incident took place in 1897, the year shown on the grandmother’s birth certificate.

I know I was assisted by angels. My friend was overjoyed and now knows who her grandmother is. ■

## 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.



*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

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 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 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.