

NO BETTER TIME TO Serve

By Allie Schulte

Whether at employment centers in Canada or orphanages in Vietnam, Welfare Services missionaries are making a huge difference and finding unexpected blessings.





NOW IS THE TIME

“Now is the time to prepare; now is the time to be called, the time to sacrifice. Now is the time to share your gifts and talents, and now is the time to receive God’s blessings for you and your family. . . . Let us, in our richest years of experience, maturity, wisdom, and most of all, our faith, rise to meet that need as only we can.”

Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Couple Missionaries: Blessings from Sacrifice and Service,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 42.

Many couples wonder if the time is right for them to serve. The couples in this article received their answers and then moved forward with faith.

Heeding the Savior’s call to “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5), Welfare Services missionaries foster self-reliance through humanitarian projects, employment workshops, addiction recovery programs, and more. In the following vignettes, Welfare Services missionaries share the challenges they faced in heeding the call to serve and testify of the blessings that they witnessed in their lives and the lives of others as they served with faith.

Trusting in the Lord’s Timing

Terri Whitesides sat alone in the chapel that Sunday. Although her husband, Grant, was attending to his leadership responsibilities in another ward, she could not stop thinking about him as she listened in sacrament meeting. The couple speaking had recently returned from serving a full-time mission, and as she listened to their experiences, Terri wondered if the time had come for her and her husband to serve as well.

Logically the timing was less than convenient. For nearly a year, the couple had been trying to sell their home, but with little success. Grant was still employed and would need to retire early. And most important, Grant’s father’s health was declining, and the couple felt responsible to help care for him. Even so, Terri mentioned her thoughts to her husband later that day.

“We decided to give it the temple test,” Grant says. “After asking the Lord to know His will, we both left the temple with a firm prompting that the time to serve was not in the future—the time to serve was now.” The Whitesides knew leaving right away would come as a shock to their family and to Grant’s employer, but to them, it felt right. “We felt that

somewhere there were people waiting for us.”

The Whitesides moved forward with faith and soon received their mission call to serve as humanitarian country directors in Cambodia. Grant retired a month before they were scheduled to enter the missionary training center (MTC). They never did sell their home, and three of their children lived in it during their mission. Although their children volunteered to help Grant’s family take care of Grandpa, less than a week before Grant and Terri entered the MTC, Grant’s father passed away. Grant and Terri were able to attend his funeral, and their trust in the Lord’s timing increased.

Following the Spirit

Aldon Nance always wanted to serve a mission, but after being drafted to serve in the Vietnam War, was unable to do so. Upon returning home, he met Connie Camper, a young woman who also dreamed of sharing the gospel as a full-time missionary. But before she had the chance, the two fell in love and were married in the Salt Lake Temple. The day of their wedding, they committed to each other that they would one day serve a mission together. Forty years later, the Nances were called to manage the employment resource center in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

“We were willing to serve wherever the Lord wanted us, but when we got our call,





we wondered ‘why employment?’” Connie says. “Neither one of us had experience in that field.”

The Nances quickly recognized how the Lord had been preparing them for their mission throughout their lives as they daily used the skills they had acquired through their own employment, Church service, and life experience. Most of all, years of daily scripture study and prayer, hundreds of family home evenings, and steadfast obedience to the counsel of the prophet helped the Nances be guided by the Spirit. “We did nothing without asking our Heavenly Father what He would want us to say and do that day,” says Connie.

One day, an immigrant from Colombia visited the employment resource center needing help finding a job. Although Connie knew little about this woman’s past employment experience, she was suddenly prompted to tell her about an opening for a mortuary receptionist. The woman’s face suddenly lit up as she explained that her last job in her home country had been working in a similar capacity. Connie helped her to apply for the

position, and the woman was later hired.

“People with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and languages would come in to the center, and because we rarely knew anything about the discipline in which they had worked or understood their language, it was often difficult to know how to help them,” Aldon says. “But we would say a quick prayer and open our mouths, and the Lord always took over.”

Working with Local Leaders

When Grant and Sherrie Atkinson began their mission for LDS Family Services in the Europe Area, addiction recovery resources of any sort were practically nonexistent in the region. And with members spread across such a large geographical area, it was nearly impossible to provide widespread services through Church-operated agencies.

“It was decided that we would introduce the Church’s Addiction Recovery Program to the stake presidents, who hold the keys to the temporal and spiritual salvation of all souls residing within their stake boundaries, and let them determine if the members in their stakes had a need for the program,” Grant says.

Over the course of a year, the Atkinsons visited more than 40 stakes in nearly 20 countries across the Europe Area. As leaders implemented the Addiction Recovery Program, the Atkinsons witnessed members make great sacrifices to attend and receive the help they needed. One young man, a returned missionary who was struggling to overcome an

THEY STRAIGHTWAY FOLLOWED HIM

“**A**nd Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

“And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

“And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

“And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

“And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.” Matthew 4:18–22



Children in Turkey (above) and Vietnam (right) are among those whose lives are blessed as couples participate in the humanitarian work of the church.



addition, rode a train for an hour and a half each way to attend a pilot program. He made the trip every week for six months.

During those six months, the Atkinsons worked with this young man's stake president to establish an Addiction Recovery Program group locally. The stake president had been trying to determine who to call as the group facilitator and soon extended the calling to this young man, who went on to aid other members in his stake in overcoming their own addictions.

"It's amazing the love that the Savior has for us and the programs that are available through priesthood leaders that teach us about the Atonement and the power it has to make people whole again," Sherrie says. "When people heal, they have a great desire to serve others and help them to do the same. The program is self-perpetuating and will continue to grow as more people become self-reliant."

Learning a Language

When Paul and Lois Fifield filled out their mission papers, they indicated they would prefer to serve an English-speaking mission. So when they received their call to serve as humanitarian specialists in Izmir, Turkey, they were stunned. But with the branch president acting as an interpreter, the Fifields coordinated various humanitarian projects, from planting pomegranate trees to donating computers to local schools and charities.

The Fifields didn't need an interpreter to understand the smiles on the faces of the people they served. The little gifts they gave the Fifields in return, such as freshly harvested pine nuts or sweet cherries, said it all. Lois still remembers the look of appreciation in the eyes of people receiving their first wheelchair or computer.

"I learned that people are the same wherever you go," Lois says. "They have the same hopes and dreams and fears and joys. So in that way, we could relate to them even though we could not speak their language."

In a country where the Church is not officially recognized, the Fifields were unable to wear their name tags or proselytize. Church members in Turkey, however, are not restricted from sharing the gospel with their family, friends, and neighbors, and whenever people expressed interest, the Fifields were able to talk to them about the gospel.

One family that expressed interest included a father who had a smoking problem. He was touched that the Fifields would fast and pray for him to be able to quit smoking. He and his family absorbed the message of the Restoration and the plan of salvation, eager to learn everything they could. The seven-year-old son read the illustrated Turkish Book of Mormon several times and

wanted to know more. After a few months of meeting with the Fifields and studying, the family was baptized.

The Fifields felt blessed to be able to share the gospel. “We learned the lessons from *Preach My Gospel* in the MTC,” says Lois, “but we never dreamed we would be using them, since we were sent primarily to do humanitarian work. We were so humbled to be able to teach the gospel. What a blessing it was for us.”

Making New Friends

After completing proselytizing missions in both Europe and South America, Lawrence and Noma Bowman were accustomed to serving around several other couples. So when they received their third mission call to work as humanitarian specialists in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, they were startled when they discovered that there was only one other couple serving in the entire country.

“We were about 1,000 miles away from the other missionary couple in Vietnam, and the mission home, located in Cambodia, was a six-hour bus ride away,” Lawrence explains. “The isolation was a challenge. There was no one to talk to or turn to for support but the Lord.”

Yet as the Bowmans began various humanitarian projects, they quickly made hundreds of new friends. At a local orphanage for youth with disabilities, they worked to install a water filtration system so that clean drinking water would be available on the property. For years, the only source of water had been a well that produced water that was only suitable for washing.

At the ceremony where the missionaries presented the system to the facility, the orphanage displayed artwork some of the students had created. As Lawrence and Noma

wandered through the halls, they noticed a few paintings that were particularly beautiful and asked to meet the artist. That was when the Bowmans first met Sam, a girl who had limited mobility in her arms and legs.

“Despite her disability, she had learned to paint with her toes,” Noma says. “We were so touched that she could express herself so beautifully despite the limitations of her body.”

Before returning home, the Bowmans purchased two of Sam’s paintings, which remind them of connections they made in Vietnam.

Leaving the Family

About 10 years before Doug and Carolyn Thurman’s mission, their son married a woman who was not a member of the Church. Their son was not active at the time.

When the Thurmans received a call to serve in the employment resource center in Independence, Missouri, USA, they began to see small changes in their daughter-in-law.

“She decided to quit smoking, so when we would call them every few weeks, she would give us an update and remind us to pray for her,” Carolyn says. “But we still had no indication that she would be receptive to the missionaries.”

Shortly before the Thurmans returned home, their son started going to church, and his wife and their three children agreed to attend as well. Soon, the entire family began meeting with the missionaries, and less than a month after the Thurmans returned home, their daughter-in-law and three grandchildren decided to be baptized.

“I was able to baptize all four of them,” says Doug. “We had been praying for a long time for a miracle, and I think it was another blessing from the Lord for our serving a mission.” ■

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

There are a variety of assignments available for Welfare Services missionaries that allow senior couples and single senior sisters to serve others and build the kingdom of God. Missionaries are called to fulfill these assignments throughout the world.

To see a list of the current needs for Welfare Services missions and other mission opportunities, visit: lds.org/service/missionary-service.

