

Memories to Carry into



By Sally Johnson Odekirk
Church Magazines

Youth conferences around the world build testimonies and friendships.

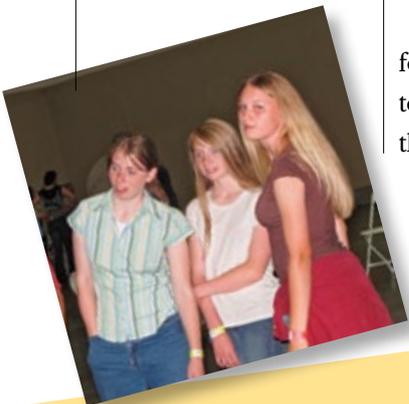
When Eric Uptain, 17, of the Spokane Washington East Stake heard about an 11-stake youth conference in his area, he decided he needed to be there. He says, "I was scheduled to work that week. I had to go through a lot to arrange to be there, but it was important to me to go."

Youth conferences have long been a way for young Latter-day Saints to strengthen testimonies and meet others who believe in the same principles and standards. President

Thomas S. Monson, in particular, has encouraged such events. He says, "Give them memories to carry into eternity, and your name will be called blessed by the Lord" (see "Mutually Beneficial," *Ensign*, Aug. 2010, 26).

Devan Fillmore, 16, of the Spokane Washington West Stake explains: "I'm glad we have them so that we can see people who are living the gospel. We can see that they are happy and having a good time, and we can see that we can have that, too."

Here are reports on several youth conferences that took place around the Church.



Col. Greg Adams of the Spokane Washington Valley Stake and the U.S. Army Reserves, spoke during a service project: "Your faith in God will carry you through life's trials. Have the courage to do what's right, no matter how hard it might be. You have the armor of God to give you spiritual protection."



Africa West Area Youth Conference: “A Mighty Change”

Young men and young women from the Africa West Area celebrated the 180th anniversary of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon last August. The event was held simultaneously in 20 venues across Africa and included over 11,000 youth from 27 stakes and 32 districts from the seven nations of the Africa West Area: Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. It was performed for an audience of more than 30,000. Hundreds of yards of cloth were cut, labeled, and packaged for delivery to outlying stakes and districts. Provided with basic patterns, drawings, and construction ideas, each area created the scenery, costuming, and special effects to stage reenactments of Book of Mormon scenes. Casts ranged in size from 40 to 1,700 participants.

Many found themselves feeling a kinship with the stories they portrayed on stage. Samuel Bagbansoro, 14, of the Abeokuta Nigeria District said, “I acted as one of the guards to the wicked King Noah. The scene with the prophet Abinadi made a great impression on my heart. I know now that whoever is filled with the Spirit of God cannot be subdued by men.”

As practices progressed and the final performances were held, young men and young women found themselves internalizing their respective roles. “Playing the part of Sariah made me seriously ponder on my role when I will be a mother and how I will be able to have the strength,” Chidinma Ijeomah said.

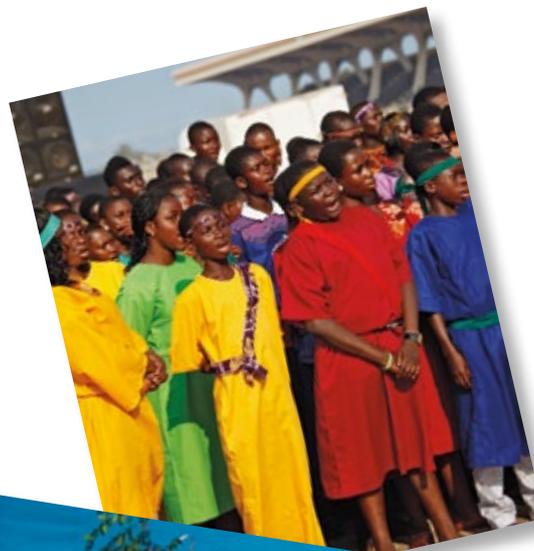
Standing atop the tower erected for the Accra production, Calvin Sowah of the Ghana Accra Adenta Stake, took on the role of King Benjamin. During a television news interview following the production, Calvin shared his perspective on the need for humble leadership in government based upon principles of righteousness. He said, “I realize that most leaders in the world today are proud. I believe that if, as King Benjamin, we will make Jesus Christ the cornerstone of our leadership, we will be good leaders.”

Submitted by Sisters Pamela J. Page and Linda J. Petersen, missionaries in the Africa West Area



Eternity

Ezekial Sunny Oni of the Lagos Nigeria Stake sums up the feelings of many who participated in this event. “I know the Book of Mormon is true and for us, our time, and our good, a gift to be cherished from our Heavenly Father,” he says.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM TAGGART



"'Arise' was amazing. The Spirit was so strong, and it was great to see so many people come out and support it. Several people told me afterwards that it was like seeing angels out on the field," says Karen Unander.

Ogden Dance Festival: "Youth Spectacular—Arise"

After 18 months of preparation, including writing, choreography, and making costumes for 3,500 youth from 31 stakes around Ogden, Utah, the production *Arise: Youth Spectacular* was performed for over 45,000 people on three different evenings at a football stadium.

Aleisha Keller, 14, of the Ogden Utah Weber Heights Stake explains, "Three councils, each including 10 stakes, presented a 20-minute dance and musical program. Our stake represented youth from Scotland dancing to live bagpipe music, and the whole group also sang three songs, including 'Called to Serve,' when each of us held up our own copy of the Book of Mormon.

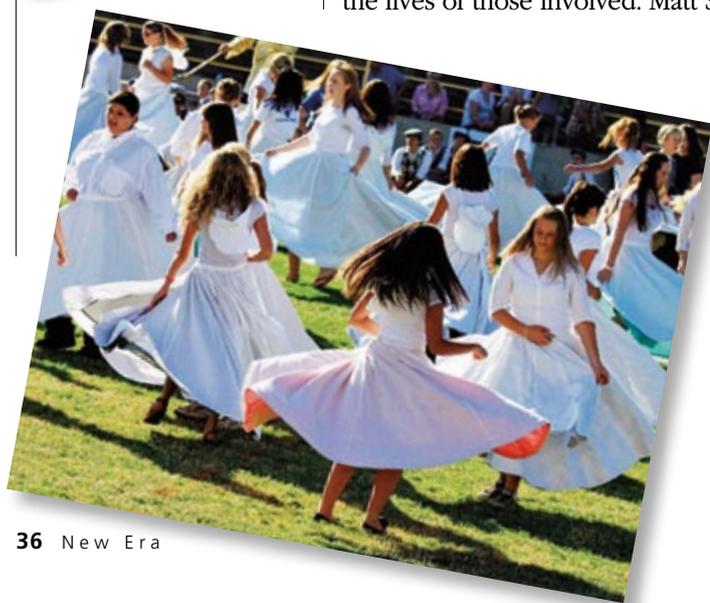
"But my favorite part of the youth spectacular," she says, "was the last song, 'Arise!' Some of the words are: 'Arise, shine forth! Be a light unto the world!' It made me feel wonderful inside that we can all work together to be a standard to everyone we associate with."

In addition to being an evening of uplifting music, the dance festival changed the lives of those involved. Matt Sakurada, 18,

of the Roy Utah North Stake says: "There were lots of missionaries participating. That meant a lot to me because my brother is serving, and it felt as if he were there. This 'Arise' program helped me to realize that I should go on a mission, too."

The pageant also touched the hearts of those who saw the production. Jolette Neeley, 20, of the Ogden Utah YSA First Stake says, "When I went to work on Monday following the performance, I ended up talking to one of my coworkers. She had been invited to the performance and pointed out that she had seen me singing and told me how much she had enjoyed it. We continued talking, and I learned that she had not been to church for some time. I was grateful for the opportunity I had to share my testimony with her and gave her the Book of Mormon that I had from the performance. I can testify that our program really did touch lives and planted seeds."

Submitted by Jerry Nelson



North America Northwest Area Youth Conference: "Be Strong and of a Good Courage"

Excitement built as word of the multistake youth conference spread. Levi Jeppson, 16, of the Lewiston Idaho Stake says, "I was really stoked, because there would be a total of 11 stakes and 1,600 kids. When we all gathered together, it was astounding. I don't think I have ever been with that many LDS kids at the same time."

The North America Northwest Area youth conference reflected the theme found in Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and of a good courage." Two days of activities, service projects, music, and inspiring messages helped teens realize that they are not alone in living clean lives and building strong testimonies.

When they came together in Spokane, Washington, enthusiasm abounded as young men and young women from the area met, made friends, worked together, sang together, and enjoyed the spirit of unity and kindness toward each other. Katelyn Ferraro, 16, of the Colville Washington Stake says, "We found we could do fun things together but be serious and spiritual as well. It makes me happy to have such a blessing in our lives and that we can make new friends."

One of the highlights of the conference was a musical program. Then Elder Whitney L. Clayton of the Seventy spoke. "We don't need to fear the future if we live the way we should," he said. "The promise to Joshua is as true today as it was in ancient times. Positive consequences follow good decisions as surely as night follows day."

Hillary Lake, 18, of the Spokane Washington Valley Stake describes the effect of youth conferences. She says, "Being with others who have a light in their eyes gives me incredible hope for the future and makes me want to be a better person."

Alyssa Cozzens, 16, of the Coeur d'Alene Idaho Stake: "If you come together with good, strong friends who support you in doing right, you have a better chance at being successful in doing what's right."

Colorado Springs North Stake Dance Festival

By Gwen Brewer



One of my favorite stories is when Nephi is asked to build a ship so his family can cross the sea. Although Nephi had complete faith, his brothers had a hard time believing this was possible; however, when it was finished, he and his family received the blessings of living in the promised land. I thought of this story when more than 350 youth in the Colorado Springs North Stake were asked to participate in a dance festival last May.

There were weekly rehearsals split into three age groups, each performing a different set of dances. "The most difficult thing for me to learn was the Tininkling [a traditional dance from the Philippines] because of the poles," says Brendyn Baker, a 13-year-old deacon in the Palmer Divide Ward. Emery Reid, a Beehive in the Chapel Hills Ward, adds, "The hardest thing about the dance festival was getting down the beat and memorizing the steps."

We persevered and kept practicing and preparing. "When it was frustrating, the thought of how it would be when it was all done kept me going," says Samantha Hacker, a Beehive in the Briargate Ward. Others had to sacrifice time and school functions to attend weekly practices. Corinne Bullock of the Gleneagle Ward was working a lot, "so sometimes I had to come straight from work," she says. David Skalla, a teacher in the Palmer Divide Ward, had to skip a swim meet for the long dress rehearsal.

Nearly 4,000 people attended the three performances given at a local high school on two evenings in May. When the lights dimmed and the crowd hushed, excitement began to build as we realized the fulfillment of the blessing of unity that our stake president promised when we began preparing for the festival.

Just as Nephi and his family received blessings after the ship was constructed, we feel the blessings received from being in the dance festival. Austin Bradley, a teacher in the Monument Ward, speaks for many. He says, "I made a lot of friendships at the dance festival, and it's a lot easier to be at stake dances now because I know a lot of people."