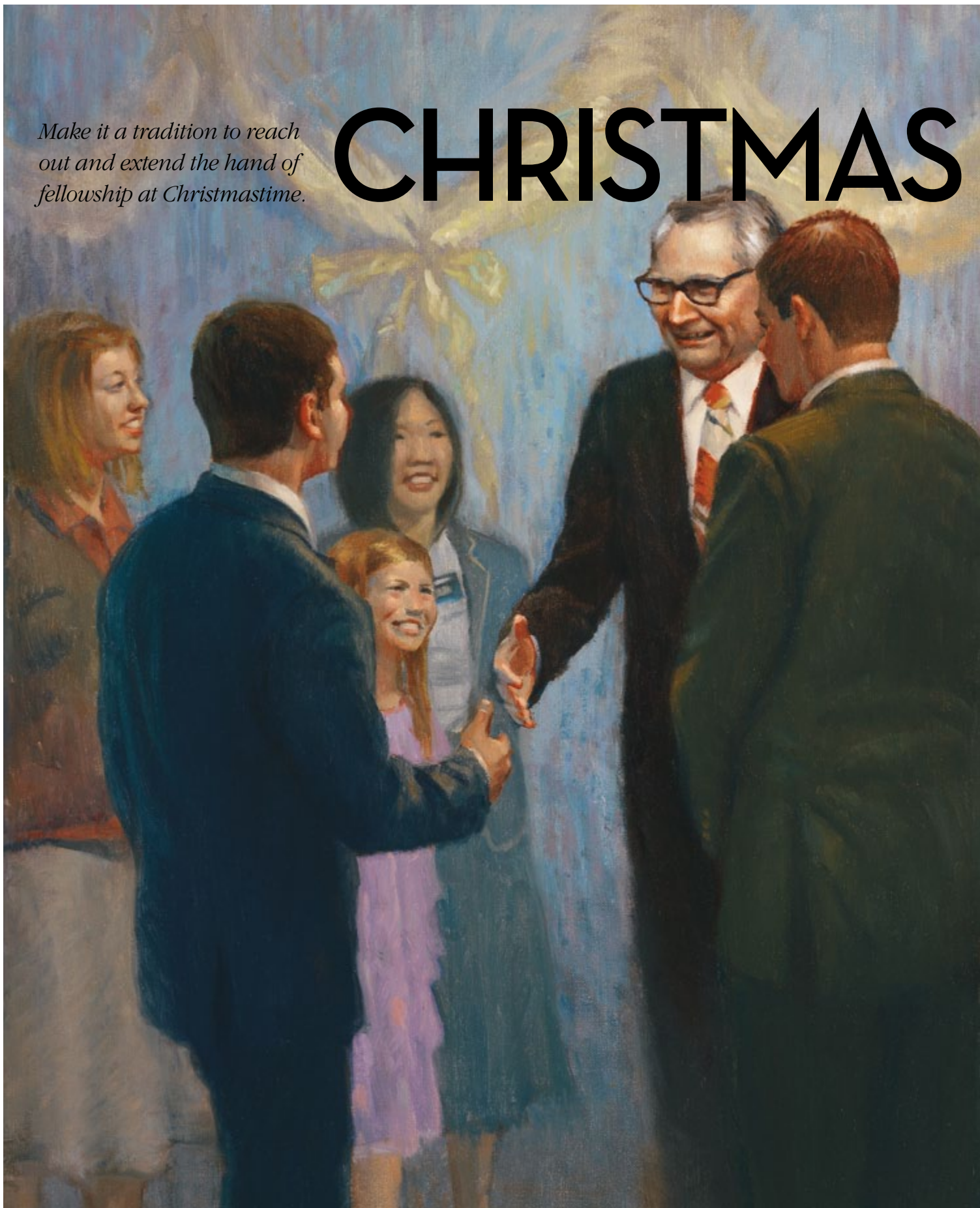


Make it a tradition to reach out and extend the hand of fellowship at Christmastime.

CHRISTMAS



at the MTC

It was about 25 years ago that I received the assignment to be chairman of the Missionary Executive Council. Christmas was approaching. It had been the practice to have a devotional at the Provo Missionary Training Center on Christmas morning with all the missionaries who were away from home; perhaps for most of them it was their first Christmas not being with family and friends.

We decided to take our turn and be the speakers at the devotional. Because it was Christmastime and Christmastime is a time of remembering families, we decided to take our children and grandchildren to the MTC with us. In those days, they didn't have the fine facilities they have today for the devotional settings. They set up chairs in the cafeteria with a small, raised platform for those that were speaking. We were very close to the missionaries, and there were certainly not the numbers that we have today.

The theme we tried to carry into the setting with the missionaries was family traditions you can carry with you in the field. We tried to emphasize those basic values they would be able to teach their investigators from their own personal experience of living in a Latter-day Saint home—the values of family prayer, family scripture study, family home evenings, counsel with fathers and mothers, and so on.

The messages seemed to be appropriate and well-received by the missionaries as family members participated. The musical

numbers were furnished by the grandchildren. We had two at that time who were without their two front teeth. They sang “All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth.” That was all we needed to gain the warm, loving appreciation of the missionaries that particular morning.

We decided to stay and have Christmas dinner with all of the missionaries. We wanted to scatter ourselves around them, so each of us, including the grandchildren, sat at a different table with these great young men and women and the couples. Conversations, of course, centered around being away from home and remembering Christmas traditions. We learned of the lessons their parents had taught to prepare them for being full-time missionaries and declaring the message of the restored gospel to the peoples of the world. It was a wonderful experience, one we'll never forget.

Now, fast forward many years. We found ourselves a year ago with the same assignment, that of being chairman of the Missionary Executive Council. Christmas was approaching. Because of the pleasant experience we'd had at the MTC those many years ago, we decided to repeat the performance.

This time, there were about twice the number of missionaries. The setting was very different, for now a beautiful auditorium had been constructed for holding devotionals. There before us were more than 2,000 wonderful full-time missionaries anxious to hear the messages we would bring to them



By Elder L. Tom Perry

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

at Christmastime. Because the setting was different and required a more formal approach, we selected the message from Matthew and Luke of the birth of the Savior.

The book of Matthew tells the remarkable account of how he wanted to be certain that everyone understood the fact that the Savior came to earth through the lineage of David the King just as the Old Testament prophets had predicted. Matthew goes on to tell the wonderful story of the wise men coming from the East to pay homage to the Christ child. They brought gifts that would greatly relieve the burden of having to flee for their safety into Egypt, as Herod the King was troubled about the fact that this King of the Jews was being born.

Each of the stories was preceded by having the scripture read by our two youngest grandchildren, J.P., who was 8 years old, and Megan, who was 10 years old.

J.P. read the verses from the book of Matthew. As the story unfolds, you wonder where Matthew went for his source of material. It is obvious that this is the story of Joseph the father, of his concern for the safety of his family, and also for supplying the family with the needs that they would require as they were to make this long journey to a distant land. Our message was on the blessed role of fathers.

Megan read the beautiful account of the shepherds coming and finding the Savior's birth taking place in a manger and the travail of Mary in bearing a child under such trying conditions. Again, it is very evident that Luke must have listened to the wondrous story told by the mother of the Savior. We elaborated on the contribution mothers have made in our lives, of nourishing, of loving, of confidence, and of giving peace and security, as only a mother can do.

Again, we decided to follow the practice of the previous experience and have dinner with the full-time missionaries. We scattered ourselves among the tables and

had a glorious time listening to their stories of home and what they were going to accomplish. We felt of the spirit they had now as full-time missionaries ready to go out in the world to declare the great message of the Restoration to the peoples of the world.

Looking at the size of the cafeteria, we decided to shake hands with the missionaries as the dinner concluded. Little did we realize that they came in waves, only about a third

of them could eat dinner at any one time. After shaking hands with the first wave, the second wave descended on us. We had to shake hands with them, and then the third wave descended on us. We spent most of the afternoon shaking hands and wishing the missionaries well as they went about their training in the Missionary Training Center.

It was interesting to see the reaction of our grandchildren. Megan, in naming her 12 favorite events a short time later, had the Christmas MTC experience listed second only to her last special birthday. To me that was a lesson taught by our grandchildren to their grandparents.

The greatest joy we have is seeking out someone in need and sharing the joy of Christmas

with them. I know you will not have the opportunity of being in the MTC, but all around you in the cities and villages, towns and townships where you have opportunity to dwell, there are those who are separated from the warmth and love of their families at Christmastime. We want to encourage you to reach out and extend the hand of fellowship to them and bring the warmth of Christmas into every soul you possibly are able to touch. You will find, just as Megan found, these are experiences you will never forget, and you will have them on the top of your list of Christmases to remember because you visited others and brought joy to them in this glorious season of the year. **NE**

From the Church News, Dec. 13, 2008.



Bring the warmth of Christmas into every soul you possibly are able to touch. You will find, just as our grandchildren found, these are experiences you will never forget.