



*The First Presidency, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and the Orchestra at Temple Square await the beginning of the annual First Presidency Christmas Devotional.*

## First Presidency Focuses on Serving Christ

Members of the First Presidency used the December 2008 First Presidency Christmas Devotional to teach members to serve the Savior and His children by making room for Him, establishing traditions that honor Him, and learning to give as He gave by loving as He loves.

President Thomas S. Monson and his counselors, President Henry B. Eyring and President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, spoke from the Conference Center. Music was provided by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square.

### **President Monson: Make Room for the Savior**

Retelling the story of the innkeeper in Bethlehem, President Monson warned members not to let the opportunity pass by to make room for Christ in their lives.

“The innkeeper missed the greatest opportunity that an innkeeper could ever have had,” President Monson said. Years later it would not do him any good to say, “‘If only I had known who they were.’”

Some homes today have rooms for eating, rooms for sleeping, play rooms, sewing rooms, television rooms, but no room for Christ, he said.

“Do we experience a pang of conscience as we recall His own words: ‘Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head’ (Luke 9:58)?” he asked.

“In our busy lives, with ever so many others competing for our attention, it is essential that we make a conscious, committed effort to bring Christ into our lives and into our homes.”

President Monson outlined the Savior’s ministry of service. “During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world. He blessed the



**President Thomas S. Monson**

sick. He caused the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. Why, He even raised the dead to life.”

However, there were only “a precious few who appreciated Him. They bathed His feet. They learned His word. They followed His example.”

President Monson explained, “As we follow in His steps today, as we emulate His example, we will have opportunities to bless the lives of others.”

But while the opportunities

to give of ourselves are limitless, President Monson said those opportunities are also perishable. "Is there someone for whom you should provide service?" he asked.

"There is yet time this year to extend the helping hand, the loving heart, and the willing spirit—in other words, to follow the example set by our Savior and to serve as He would have us serve," President Monson said. "As we do serve Him, we will not forfeit our opportunity, as did the innkeeper of old, to make time for Him in our lives and room for Him in our hearts. . . . May we follow Him, serve Him, honor Him, and receive in our lives His gifts to us."

#### **President Eyring: Disciples of the Lamb Honor Him**

Disciples of Jesus Christ establish family traditions that honor the Savior's life and teach who He is and what He has done for us, said President Eyring.

Each Christmas Eve, the Eyring family performed a family Christmas pageant based on the scriptural accounts of the Savior's birth. Through the years, the children filled the parts of Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, shepherds, angels, wise men, and even sheep. The annual experience helped teach them about the Savior, why they should love Him, and how they should honor Him.

But looking back, President Eyring said, he wished he had taught them more about what an important part they were playing as lambs. "They were following the shepherds to honor the baby Jesus,

born to be the infinite sacrifice, the priceless gift of Heavenly Father to all His children," he said.

As John the Baptist said, the Savior was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

"The Savior, the Lamb of God, was the greatest gift ever given," President Eyring said. "His perfect life and His unimaginable suffering made possible our forgiveness from all sin and the possibility to choose eternal life; to be lifted up to live forever with God, in families, and in glory."

President Eyring explained that for us to receive that gift, "we must try with all our hearts and strength to



**President Henry B. Eyring**

do what He did. We cannot give the great gift to others that He gave, the gift of the Atonement . . . but we can try to do His works and help Him serve others as He would serve them."

For many disciples of Christ, that service is part of their family traditions, President Eyring said. Though each family's traditions may differ according to circumstances, he encouraged every family to create traditions with some things in common:

"They will draw hearts to the Savior," he said. And "they will include acts of kindness, which in the world to come will merit the approbation of the Savior as He welcomes those He honors with the title of being His sheep."

#### **President Uchtdorf: Give as He Gave by Loving as He Loves**

President Uchtdorf encouraged members not to be distracted from the real meaning of Christmas by the getting and giving of gifts but rather to learn how to give from the example of the Savior.

"In our modern world, we often think of giving and receiving gifts when we think of Christmas," he said. "Although this can be part of a cherished tradition, it can also detract from the simple dignity of the season and distract us from celebrating the birth of our Savior in a meaningful way. . . . It doesn't take expensive gifts to make Christmas meaningful."

In considering simplicity, President Uchtdorf encouraged members to "think of the simple yet dignified way our Heavenly Father chose to honor the birth of His Son. On that holy night, angels appeared not to the rich, but to the shepherds. The Christ child was born not in a mansion, but in a manger. The child was wrapped not in silk, but in swaddling clothes."

President Uchtdorf taught that the simplicity of that first Christmas foreshadowed the modest, humble life of the Savior.

"He had no place to lay His head, and He walked

ever among the poor, the sick, the downcast, and the heavy laden. Though He was a King, He cared neither for the honors nor for the riches of men. His life, His words, His daily activities were monuments of simple yet profound dignity."

President Uchtdorf explained that "Jesus the Christ, who knew perfectly how to give, set for us the pattern of giving.

"To those whose hearts are heavy with loneliness and sorrow, He brings compassion and comfort. To those whose bodies and minds are afflicted with illness and suffering, He brings love and healing. To those whose souls



**President Dieter F. Uchtdorf**

are burdened with sin, He offers hope, forgiveness, and redemption."

With the Savior's example in mind, President Uchtdorf invited members: "As He gave to us, let us give to Him by loving as He loves. . . .

"May we remember the humble dignity of His birth, His gifts, and His life. May we, through our simple acts of kindness, charity, and compassion, fill the world with the light of His love and His healing power." ■

# Wheelchairs Enable Recipients Worldwide

By Eric Eames, Church Magazines

The Kabin Buri district in Thailand is considered “up country,” which means it takes a lot of gasoline and traveling along rough roads to get there. It is in this obscure area where Pipop Leytaison begins every day with anticipation, hoping to inspire the disabled through his ability.

Having no use of his arms or legs since birth, Mr. Leytaison, who is now 50 years old, spent most of his life being carried from place to place in someone else’s arms. Yet he always yearned for the chance to be more self-reliant.

Ever since Mr. Leytaison received a wheelchair as part of one of the Church’s ongoing humanitarian service initiatives, he has not only become more independent, but he has also become a champion for the disabled. He has helped provide a training center that teaches others with disabilities how they can support themselves. He has organized a support network to help find and deliver information to the disabled. Through this network two businesses have been created, providing jobs where those with disabilities and those without work side

by side. He has also developed a small farm to raise chickens, wild boars, fish, and frogs.

“Wheelchairs improve [recipients’] sense of well-being and self-worth as they become more able to assist and care for themselves,” said Sister Theone Snow of Sydney, Australia, who is serving a humanitarian mission in Thailand with her husband, Robert.

## First Major Humanitarian Initiative

From 2001 to 2008 the Church delivered nearly 300,000 wheelchairs in 95 countries.

With help from the Wheelchair Foundation, a nonprofit organization focused on bringing the gift of mobility to the disabled,

the Church’s wheelchair program began in 2001 as the first of four major humanitarian initiatives along with clean water (2002), neonatal resuscitation training (2003), and vision care (2003).

There have also been two special initiatives: measles eradication (2003); and family food production (2007), which is supported by the Benson Institute (an agricultural research institute established in honor of Church President Ezra Taft Benson [1899–1994] through Brigham Young University in 1975).

“With the wheelchairs, we saw a worldwide, ongoing need for this product,” said Patrick Reese, humanitarian services planning and administration manager.

## Different Wheelchairs

Over the years the Church has improved the program by offering four different models of wheelchairs, each designed for a variety of terrains and needs. The four different types include a standard hospital wheelchair that comes in five sizes; an outdoor wheelchair with thick inflatable tires; the “rough rider” wheelchair, which allows travel over curbs, steps, and rougher terrain; and a specialized tricycle-style wheelchair that allows people to push themselves forward and steer with a hand crank.

Most of the wheelchairs are produced in China. However, the Church is beginning to emphasize local production of the wheelchairs in order to provide jobs for disabled individuals



**Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy, Asia Area President, presents His Excellency Kamthon Sindhvananda, president of the king of Thailand’s Sai Jai Thai Foundation, and Araya Arunanondchai with wheelchairs.**

and to stimulate a country's economy. Local production also provides better repair options, since the parts are made locally.

The Church uses factories in Kenya, Vietnam, and South Africa, where wheelchair recipients are employed to produce the specialized, rough terrain wheelchairs. Brother Reese said more such factories are forthcoming, as is a training program to help people who receive a wheelchair learn how to use it and repair it. The training will also teach participants jobs they can perform in a wheelchair.

#### The Blessings of Mobility

Improper health care, accidents, and birth defects have immobilized an estimated 50 to 100 million children and adults worldwide. Wheelchairs can enable these individuals to become a part of the community, socialize, and assist with household duties.

In northern Thailand, 40-year-old Sutham Yamao was born with crippled hands and feet. Since his parents died in 1998, Mr. Yamao has lived on his own and has managed to bathe, clothe, and feed himself without assistance, while nearby relatives provide him with any additional care.

Just down the road, Assadavoot Pingti, age 30, has been paralyzed on his right side since a motorcycle accident in 2003. Mr. Pingti's mother has taken care of him, and his only brother comes to help move him from place to place.

Both men were thrilled when they recently received

wheelchairs from Latter-day Saint Charities. Mr. Yamao had a friend push him around the community in his new wheelchair. Mr. Pingti smiled in a sign of appreciation, while his mother was grateful that her son would be able to move around on his own for the first time in five years.

"Many have waited years to have the mobility the chair provides," Elder Snow said. "In many other cases it is the other members of the family who come with tears in their eyes to thank us for the help we have provided, as it lessens the burden on them and allows them to pursue other activities that will strengthen the family."

#### Church Partners with Local Charities

Latter-day Saint Charities teams with many local non-profit organizations to identify people in need and deliver wheelchairs to them. In 2007 the Church recognized the King of Thailand on his 80th birthday by donating 1,000 wheelchairs to His Majesty the King's charities.

In August 2008 LDS Charities made a similar donation to the Sai Jai Thai Foundation. Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy, Asia Area President, officially presented the wheelchairs to the foundation's president.

Elder Hallstrom spoke at the ceremony about the Church's role in helping millions of people in more than 160 countries. Sister Snow said partnering charities are particularly touched when they find out that the wheelchairs come from fast-offering donations

made by members worldwide. These funds are specifically set aside to assist the poor and needy.

In the last two years more than 3,000 wheelchairs were distributed in Thailand. In 2008 about 8,000 wheelchairs were sent to Turkey and China.

"To see a mother struggling to carry her 25-year-old son

on her back because that is the only way he can be transported and then to see him tenderly being placed in his wheelchair is a memory that will be difficult for me to erase," Sister Snow said. "I know the Lord is smiling His approval as we assist each person, who is His beloved child." ■

### It Wasn't an Ordinary Day

By Sister Cathern Roberts

The morning was like any other on the streets of downtown Solo, Indonesia —people came and went, motorcycles dodged between cars, and vendors were setting out their wares. But then I noticed her. A little old woman sitting on a mat with her legs folded under a ragged dress stretched her hands toward me. Her palms showed only stubs where her fingers should have been. Her mouth was open, but no sound came out. Her plea was in her tired eyes.

I was deeply moved by the scene. I placed some coins in her tiny palms then started on my way, but something drew me back. I bent down, and putting my hand on her cheek, said, "Allah, Berkat Ibu" (God bless you, mother).

We saw her from time to time during the next few weeks, and we would always exchange the same greetings. Then one day, Latter-day Saint Charities (LDSC) provided us wheelchairs to

place wherever we saw the need. I immediately thought of her.

We went to the place where she usually sat, and for the first time I noticed the set of handmade wooden crutches lying on the ground behind her. They were worn with age, and the paint chips that still clung to them indicated they had once been red.

A man who turned out to be her husband approached us and put his right hand straight out in front of him for me to shake; he was blind. He said he had longed to buy a wheelchair for her but could not afford such a luxury. Smiling, he said, "I can push!" even though he was blind.

The following week we scanned the crowd and could make out the bright white LDSC emblem on the back of her chair. She sat in it proudly, comfortably, and perhaps a little taller.

These words came to mind: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

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## Training Meetings Available Online

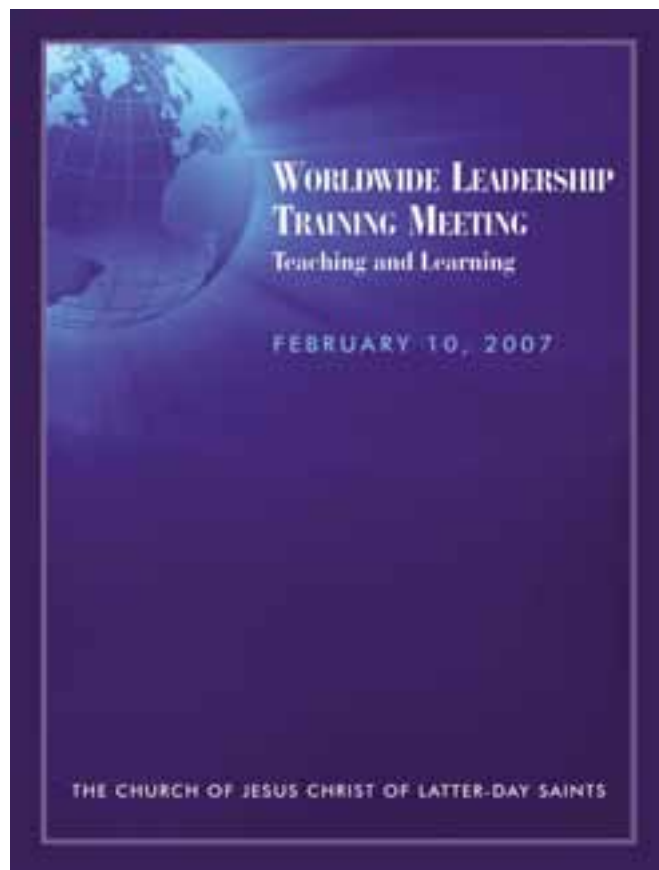
The First Presidency has announced that no Worldwide Leadership Training broadcast will be held in 2009. A letter to priesthood leaders suggests that leaders review previous broadcasts and use them for continuing instruction according to unit needs.

Proceedings of broadcasts from 2006, 2007, and 2008 are available online in many languages. The meetings were broadcast over the Church satellite system and are available in a variety of formats. Meetings prior to 2006 were distributed in booklet form.

The 2008 training session, titled *Building Up a Righteous Posterity*, is available in text, audio, or video format in 12 languages and in audio formats in 61 languages. The broadcast included messages from President Thomas S. Monson; President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of

the Twelve Apostles; Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and a roundtable discussion with Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Elder Holland; Julie B. Beck, Relief Society general president; Susan W. Tanner, then Young Women general president; and Cheryl C. Lant, Primary general president. The broadcast originally aired on February 9, 2008.

The 2007 training session, titled *Teaching and Learning*, is available in text in 22 languages, in audio in 10 of those languages, and as video in American Sign Language, English, and Spanish. Included in the training were messages from President Thomas S. Monson, President Boyd K. Packer, Elder L. Tom Perry, and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The meeting was held on February 10, 2007.



The 2006 training session, titled *Supporting the Family*, is available in text in 38 languages, in audio in 10 of those languages, and as video in American Sign Language, English, and Spanish. The broadcast featured President Thomas S. Monson, Elder L. Tom Perry

and Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and Bonnie D. Parkin, then general president of the Relief Society.

To access the online material at LDS.org, go to **Gospel Library** and click on **Worldwide Leadership Training**. ■

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## Virtue Added as Young Women Value

The First Presidency has announced the addition of the attribute of “virtue” to the Young Women theme and values.

“This addition will assist young women in developing high moral standards,” stated the November 28, 2008, letter from the First Presidency. “We invite parents and leaders to teach the doctrine of chastity and moral purity to help each

young woman to be virtuous and worthy to make and keep sacred covenants and receive the ordinances of the temple.”

The text of the Young Women theme now states: “We are daughters of our Heavenly Father, who loves us, and we love Him. We will ‘stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places’ (Mosiah 18:9) as we strive

to live the Young Women values, which are: Faith, Divine Nature, Individual Worth, Knowledge, Choice and Accountability, Good Works, Integrity, and Virtue. We believe as we come to accept and act upon these values, we will be prepared to strengthen home and family, make and keep sacred covenants, receive the ordinances of the temple, and enjoy the

blessings of exaltation.”

Young Women leaders were invited to include immediately the addition of “virtue” as they repeat the theme with their young women.

“Virtue” is also being added to the Personal Progress value experiences and projects. Instructions on how to implement the change will be sent to leaders. ■

## WORLD BRIEFS

**DVD Available  
about President Monson**

*On the Lord's Errand*, a new DVD about the life and service of President Thomas S. Monson, is now available in 14 languages through distribution centers and [ldscatalog.com](http://ldscatalog.com). The 60-minute video was broadcast between sessions of the October 2008 general conference. The available languages include: American Sign Language, Cantonese, Cebuano, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Tagalog.

**LDS Maps Available  
in 16 Languages**

The meetinghouse locator service, LDS Maps, provided through [LDS.org](http://LDS.org), [Mormon.org](http://Mormon.org), and [maps.lds.org](http://maps.lds.org), is now available in 16 languages. Users can search for the nearest place and times of worship by entering an address or by identifying a location on a map. Phone numbers, driving directions, and other unit information are also available.

The service was first available online to residents in the United States and Canada in May 2001. Worldwide coverage was made available in August 2008.

**FamilySearch Collaborates  
on Canadian, U.S. Records**

FamilySearch International is teaming up with Ancestry.ca and the Houston Public Library in Houston, Texas, USA, to improve access to records from the U.S. Gulf Coast area and Canadian censuses.

The collaboration with Ancestry.ca, Canada's leading online family history site, will provide more thorough and comprehensive Canadian census data. The collaboration with the Houston Public Library will digitally preserve and provide free access to city and county histories in the area.

**LDS Business College  
Appoints New President**

John L. (Larry) Richards was appointed as the new president of LDS Business College on December 9, 2008.

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles made the announcement on behalf of the LDS Business College Board of Trustees. President Richards succeeds Stephen K. Woodhouse, who is retiring from LDS Business College after serving as a member of the faculty since 1989 and as president since 1992.

## AROUND THE CHURCH

## Elder David A. Bednar Visits Filipino Saints

Latter-day Saints in the Philippines were delighted in August 2008 when Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and his wife, Susan, visited the Philippines for the first time.

Elder Bednar presided over the Cebu Philippines Central Stake conference and held several devotionals and meetings with the Saints, full-time missionaries, temple workers, and Church employees from August 15 to 20, 2008.

In a devotional for single adults, Elder Bednar said, "Revelation is real and available to every member of the Church. . . . Taking the Holy

Spirit for our guide is essential for our spiritual growth and survival in an increasingly wicked world."

During stake conference, he taught that homes should be an avenue for learning—a place where inspired questions are answered with the assistance of the Spirit, where the gospel of Jesus Christ is learned and obeyed.



**Elder David A. Bednar greets members in Cebu, Philippines.**

PHOTOGRAPH BY RANDY TAN

He told youth in a special devotional that full-time missionary service is challenging and sometimes hard, but with the help of the Lord, it can be done. "Study the scriptures daily and be obedient to all of God's commandments. When you live the gospel, you can help encourage others to do the same," he said.

In a Manila devotional with members, Elder Bednar taught that the Atonement provides two overarching blessings in our lives. First and foremost, through the Atonement of Jesus Christ we can be cleansed and redeemed from sin. Second, the Atonement strengthens us to do good and to be good. Grace is the strengthening, empowering, and enabling element of the Atonement. ■

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## Church Helps Tanzania with Measles Vaccinations

Thousands of children in Tanzania were vaccinated against measles in 2008. The immunization effort was a collaboration between the Tanzania Red Cross and Ministry of Health, the United Nations, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Measles is a highly contagious disease that continues to claim lives around the world, but is easily prevented. For this reason, an international partnership for the eradication of measles has received significant Church support.

Elder Kirk and Sister Carol

Waldron, missionaries serving in the Kenya Nairobi Mission, went to Tanzania to help local leaders. Under the direction of Dar es Salaam District president Laurian Ponsiano Balilemwa the immunization effort was organized in the district's four branches. Some 150 Church members walked considerable distances to volunteer their time in the campaign.

There were more than 100

posts situated throughout the Dar es Salaam District where people could be vaccinated. Church members distributed brochures and notices and registered the children who would be vaccinated. Thousands of children received the measles vaccination as well as oral polio drops, deworming medication, and vitamin A. Volunteers contributed a total of 4,176 hours, saving thousands of dollars in operating costs. ■

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## Members Serve across Africa

Members in more than 30 African countries collaborated in a historic Africa-wide community service initiative on September 20, 2008. The event, known as Mormon Helping Hands Day, involved almost 1,000 communities across the continent and generated 100,000 hours

of community service.

Projects included cleaning and painting homes for the elderly and disabled, improving care facilities for abused women and children, revitalizing children's parks, supplying wheelchairs, and planting gardens.

"There are so many people on the African continent

who live without hope," said Leon Holmes, who coordinated the service in South Africa as national director of public affairs for the Church there. "Many are struggling with personal challenges such as disability, terminal illness, substance addiction, prolonged unemployment, physical and

emotional abuse, broken homes. . . . Opportunities to provide relief are boundless."

The continent-wide service day was first held in 2007. The success of that event resulted in almost doubling the number of countries involved in the 2008 venture. ■

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## Church Responds to Flooding

Flooding in Brazil and Panama killed dozens and left thousands without shelter in late November 2008.

### Brazil

Days of heavy rain in the Santa Catarina state of Brazil in late November 2008 caused landslides, collapsed roads, and devastated the area, leaving at least 112 dead and more than 80,000 people without shelter.

More than one million people were affected by the storms. The greatest damage occurred in the southeastern

part of Brazil, along the eastern coast. Landslides stopped transportation throughout the state, and at least eight towns were cut off by the floodwaters.

All of the missionaries serving in the Brazil Florianópolis Mission were reported safe and accounted for. At least 80 percent of the members in the Vale do Itajaí Brazil Stake were moved from their homes. Three meetinghouses in the area were partially flooded.

Members and other affected residents found shelter at the stake center as

regional welfare specialists and civil defense specialists discussed how to best provide assistance. Part of that assistance was met by purchasing basic items with fast-offering funds to help local members in need.

### Panama

Flooding in the western part of Panama caused damage to more than 5,700 homes and killed at least five people. The storms hit in late November 2008, causing five rivers in the Chiriqui and Bocas del Toro provinces to flood.

The rains caused a reported

60 landslides throughout the area, destroying at least 16 homes and damaging 85 more. In addition, more than 3,000 people fled their homes in neighboring Costa Rica.

At least 185 Church members in the area evacuated to the homes of friends and family. Two of three rented meetinghouses were flooded. Despite the weather, the missionaries serving in the Panama Panama City Mission were reported safe and were not evacuated. Supplies needed for the flood victims' immediate relief were purchased with humanitarian funds. ■