



BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE
Church Magazines

The electricity in the air is palpable—literally. In fact, the spectacular electrical storms that occur regularly in and around Johannesburg, South Africa, are so prevalent that the city is an international center for lightning research. Some people believe the reason lightning storms hit this area so often has to do with high levels of gold and other mineral deposits in the ground. But no one is really sure.

Inside the Daveyton meetinghouse, about 28 miles

(40 km) east of Johannesburg, there's an obvious reason for the electricity in the air: it's the Benoni Second Branch. The excitement is generated because this is the first young single adult (YSA) unit in Africa, and these young adults are charged up.

“There was a lot of buzz going around” as word of a possible YSA branch spread throughout the Benoni South Africa Stake, says branch president Stuart Taylor. “The excitement was definitely there.” The excitement has only grown since the branch was created in February 2006.



Left: Members of the Benoni Second Branch, the first young single adult unit in Africa, attend Sunday School. Above: The Daveyton meetinghouse, where the branch meets.

understand each other.” The sense of unity and integration among these young adults of mixed ethnic backgrounds is something extraordinary, especially when one considers South Africa’s not too distant political history of apartheid. But the gospel has brought these young people together as friends and fellow Saints.

President Taylor likes to point out that the young adults completely staff this branch. They are the ones who make it what it is. The lessons are from their peers. The comments are from their peers. The experiences are from their peers. “I remember the first Relief Society meeting; it was just wonderful,” says Lee-Anne Holmes. “It was so geared toward us, for this time in our lives, and for our age group.”

It is the attitude and spirit of the members that make this branch stand out. “I enjoy the testimony meetings,” says Bonyani Dukhele. “It is so uplifting to hear someone of the same age bearing testimony. It is wonderful to know that this person is going through what I am going through, yet he can do it. It gives me strength.”

Branch members draw strength from their similarities. “We face the same challenges and the same trials,” explains Phumzile Ndala. “So we face them together, and then we help each other overcome the challenges when we discuss them.”

Opportunity to Grow

The Benoni Second Branch is a powerful example of putting the words of the Savior into practice when He commanded the Saints, “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). The unity in

UP

Members of the Benoni Second Branch—South Africa’s first young single adult unit—are excited about their opportunities for unity.

“It’s a mind-boggling experience,” says Vincent Mabena, speaking about being part of the new branch. “I feel it will be a great opportunity for us to grow.” These young single adults are thrilled to accept the responsibilities that come with their new callings. They look forward to making a difference in a branch they feel is unique.

What’s the Difference?

Young single adults enjoy attending this branch, says Edward Soll, because “we feel more comfortable. We

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL VANDENBERGHE, EXCEPT AS NOTED; INSET, LEFT: PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CAREL R. HEYDENRYCH

the branch goes beyond the obvious fact that its members share so much in common; they truly look out for each other and desire to help one another.

“Everyone notices if you’re not here,” says Markus Botha. “I’ve heard a lot of people say something like, ‘So-and-so is not here this week,’ and they’ll call them.” This kind of awareness was happening before the home and visiting teaching programs were organized, but now the members are even more conscientious about each other. They realize that if something is going to get done, they are the ones who have to do it.

Our Responsibility

President Taylor excitedly tells of how things have come together under the auxiliary presidencies’ leadership. “Knowing that we are responsible for everything that is going to happen here is exciting,” says Harry Mnisi.

Kirsten Taylor, President Taylor’s daughter, puts it this way: “I think it helps us grow spiritually now that it’s our responsibility. It’s not like when we were in our home wards and we would think, ‘Oh, it’s our parents’ responsibility.’ We never really thought, ‘Look how few there are today. We have to do something about this.’ But now we do.”

“Not all of us are active,” she continues. “We have a lot of work to do. But it’s so great that we can help each other grow together and be a great example to other African countries.”

“It tells us that we need to do more missionary work now,” adds Harry. “We’ve got to do more. We can do more!”

Missionary Work

Shortly after the branch’s creation, President Taylor challenged the members to bring their friends who were not coming to church. “I was actually a bit surprised how

many people did pitch up the next Sunday,” he says. “I was excited at the response.”

The heart of President Taylor’s challenge is essentially about friendship. “Missionary work, to me, is being a friend,” he says. “That’s the most important way to reach others.” He lets the branch members know that true missionary work is not something to do out of obligation or to keep the stake presidency happy; it’s about loving others.

Taryn Morritt says the excitement generated by the new branch has created opportunities to take up President Taylor’s challenge in several ways. First, many young adults have been motivated to action. “When we were in our home wards, we were in our comfort zones,” Taryn explains. “Now we want this branch to grow, so we are constantly thinking of other people we can bring and whom we should invite.”

Simply gathering together as young adults

for Sunday services and other activities provides the second way President Taylor’s vision of missionary work is bringing results. Taryn says that before the branch was organized, the young adults didn’t have many chances to get together. And when they did have an activity, it was too easy to stick by an existing group of friends. “Now we tend to make friends with people we never would have before.”

Making a Difference

The initial buzz that spread through the Benoni stake when word of a young single adult branch surfaced has not diminished. In fact, the excitement seems to be building. “I like hearing people saying ‘the ward’—but we’re not a ward yet. We’re looking in that direction,” says President Taylor. “We’re progressing. These young people are very enthusiastic about their callings, and they’re already making a difference.” ■



Bearers of the priesthood clear the sacrament table after sacrament meeting. “These young people are very enthusiastic about their callings,” says branch president Stuart Taylor. “They’re already making a difference.”