

TOURS & TESTIMONIES



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTINA SMITH, EXCEPT AS NOTED



As they teach visitors about Church history, missionaries on Temple Square invite people to come unto Christ.

BY ANDY CARGAL

Sister Krista Cockerill felt like pulling her hair out. Children were running all over the Temple Square North Visitors' Center, dashing through doors and displays, and in the midst of the chaos, she and her missionary companion were attempting to teach a group of people about God's plan for families. In an effort to create order, she had the group sit down and began teaching them about prophets. "I then bore my testimony about the light of Christ that prophets bring and about the guidance they give us," says Sister Cockerill. "And the kids actually sat and listened."

After the presentation one family stayed to speak with the sisters. During their conversation, a woman who had sat silently in the back while the sisters taught came up to Sister Cockerill, handed her a note, and walked away. Sister Cockerill waited until they were finished speaking with the family to read its message.

"I've been living in darkness for 13 years.

"I need the light in my life.

"Please, send them quickly."

Sister Cockerill and her companion, Sister Emily Brown, hurried downstairs, where they found the woman sitting

Below: Some of the 206 sister missionaries who serve on Temple Square pose in front of the nearby Beehive House, which was previously the office of President Brigham Young.



TEACHING ABOUT ETERNAL FAMILIES

By Sister Mable Shea, Zambia, Africa

I once had an experience with a woman named Christina. She and her family were visiting from Washington, and after we talked for a while, I asked them if they knew anyone I could call to share a little more about the Church. But they said they knew no one.

As we continued to speak, I felt prompted to tell them about my conversion. I had a sister who had died, and for many years we wondered what had happened to her. When the missionaries came to our home, they taught about eternal families, and I was happy because I realized I could be with my sister again. After I related this experience and shared my testimony, Christina told me that she wanted to refer her two sisters.

I called one of them the next week, and she agreed to visit with the missionaries, but the other sister was never home. After making several attempts, I felt prompted to send in the referral card without having spoken to her.

I reached her two weeks later, and she told me the missionaries had already been there. She said they came at the right time. Her ex-husband had died a week earlier, and as she looked at her current family mem-

bers, she wondered what would happen to them when *they* died. And then the missionaries showed up and taught her about eternal families. She said she was excited for the missionaries to come back, and she wanted her girls to be there to listen. I was so happy. ■

Above: Sister Mable Shea from Africa (left) with her companion, Sister Elizabeth Serna from Mexico.

on a sofa. She had not given her address, so they asked for it in order to send missionaries to her home. Although she desperately wanted to be taught, she was hesitant.

“They won’t come,” the woman said. “They won’t come and visit me.”

Confused, they asked why and discovered that she lived with her father, who wouldn’t allow it. Feeling prompted by the Spirit, Sister Brown said, “I promise you that if you ask your father with a sincere heart to let the missionaries visit you, he will open his doors.”

She *did* speak to her father, he opened his doors, the missionaries taught her, and she was baptized.

A Different Kind of Mission

Experiences such as this happen frequently for the approximately 185 missionaries who serve on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Their mission is unique. They do not knock on doors, teach standard lessons, or baptize people. In fact, after contacting individuals just once, they usually never see or talk to them again. Yet they are still missionaries, set apart, armed with a message of hope, desiring to help people come unto Christ. Some say they are the “angels” on Temple Square.

Unlike other missions, the Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square Mission is entirely staffed by full-time sister missionaries who spend much of their time conducting tours for the millions who visit the historic temple grounds every year. Yet

their overall goal is the same as in other missions: to “invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.”¹

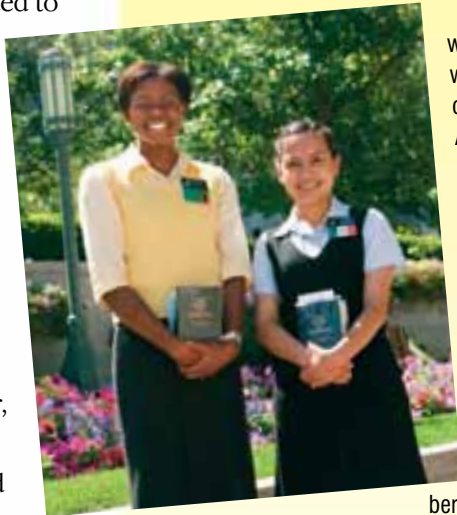
“Even though we’re giving tours, we still want that ultimate goal for every single person we talk to,” says Sister Cockerill, from Scott City, Kansas. “That’s why we’re here. That’s why the prophet called us here.”

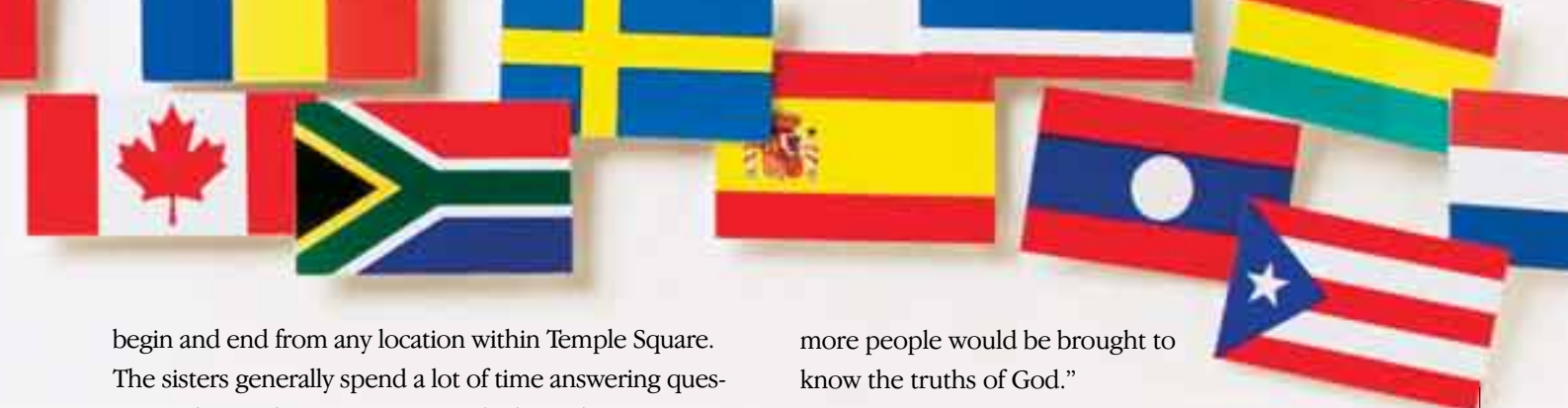
Teaching the Word of God

While the Temple Square mission is distinct from others in its operation, the sisters here share a common responsibility with other missionaries throughout the world—teaching. And they do a lot of it. For example, Sister Jessica Ling from Hong Kong once conducted a tour of 70 people, teaching them in her native language of Cantonese. And here—the people come to the missionaries! With an average of more than 5,000 people visiting Temple Square every day, the sisters get plenty of opportunities to teach.

“I love teaching,” says Sister Mable Shea, from Lusaka, Zambia. “We have the opportunity to speak to people of all faiths. We get to talk to kings and queens and magistrates. We can teach people even though we never get to see what happens to them.”

Although Temple Square missionaries do not teach standard missionary lessons, they strive to lead their tours by the Spirit, and their comments are laden with gospel principles and teachings. Typical tours take 30 minutes and can





begin and end from any location within Temple Square. The sisters generally spend a lot of time answering questions. They make it a point to teach about the Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith and also to visit the *Christus* statue in the North Visitors' Center. "That is one of our favorite spots, and also one of the most important ones, because people see that we have Jesus Christ at the center of all we do," says Sister Cockerill.

At the end of each tour the sisters ask the guests if they want to learn more about the Church. If the visitors are Church members, the missionaries ask them to refer their friends—and the responses are plentiful. Each year the sisters gather thousands of referrals and send them to states and nations around the world, making Temple Square the highest referring mission in the Church. "We really need the members," explains Sister Shea. "I know that if every member of the Church had a commitment to say, 'I will bring at least one soul to the kingdom of God,' so many

more people would be brought to know the truths of God."

Challenges

While some might perceive this to be an "easy" mission where the missionaries introduce Church movies, greet people, and teach all day long, the sisters say it has its own unique challenges.

Sister Shea says one of these is that they never know anything about the people they will teach before those visitors walk onto the grounds.

Sister Ling says that although teaching large groups is exciting, it is difficult to focus on what each person needs.

Teaching is also challenging, says Sister Cockerill, because the sisters rarely learn what happens to the people they met and referred to other missionaries. "We get to know these families and what's going on in their lives. And then we tell them that their lives are going to be



Sister Julie Vance (left) and her companion, Sister Lily Llamzon, talk to visitors at the April 2007 general conference.



FACTS AS OF JUNE 2006

Total missionaries: approximately 207
 Countries represented: 38
 Languages spoken: 34
 Mission size: 34 acres
 Sisters who speak another language in addition to English: 97
 Referrals generated: 54,000 in 2006

better if they start living the teachings of Jesus Christ. They write their names and addresses down on a referral card, and then we send it—and we just put our faith in God.”

The sisters say that one of the greatest challenges is that many members don’t fully understand the nature of what they do, believing either that they are merely tour guides or are simply seeking referrals. Sister Shea’s response typifies that of Temple Square missionaries. “When I was called as a missionary, I was called to be a representative of the Savior. I want to see everyone I talk to get baptized one day so they can have what we have. I want to go home knowing I was able to use every opportunity I was given, that I was able to magnify my calling as I reached out to people.”

Finding People Who Are Prepared

Sister Shea says that elders and sisters in conventional missions form a bond with those they teach, and they learn to love them. “When those they teach reject the gospel, it’s so hard. And when they accept it, it’s heaven on earth,” she says. “And those are some of the opportunities we miss here on Temple Square. But there is a reason we have this mission, and there is a reason each one of us has been called here. Our purpose is to find those people who have been prepared for us. So I’m happy. I’m happy to be on Temple Square.”

Because these sisters do not have the same routine as those in other missions, a program has been set up to give them a taste of what missionary work is like outside Temple Square. At about the midpoint of their missionary



Top left: Sister Unbyul Cho and Sister Mi-Jin Hwang, both from Korea, welcome visitors at the north gate of Temple Square. Top right: Sister Jenna Bond and Sister Ashley Tax, both from the United States, answer questions of a Temple Square visitor. Above: Sister missionaries identify their native language so that visitors can have a tour of Temple Square in the language they choose.



service, sisters are temporarily reassigned to another mission within the United States. Their assigned missions are chosen by the Missionary Department, and this service lasts for a period of 12–18 weeks, or 2–3 transfers.



Sister Nseabasi Ikpe from Nigeria, Africa.

“When the sisters return, they come back better missionaries because, for the first time, they get to see why what they do is so important,” says Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square mission president Milo LeBaron.

Sister Cockerill says her experience in the Colorado Denver South Mission taught her the importance of persistence. She says that prior to her reassignment, if people she contacted on Temple Square told her they didn’t want to talk to her, she would just let them pass by. Now, she says, “I can’t just let people walk by me. I have to talk to them. I have to see what they need. And if they say no to me again, then I say OK, it’s another sister’s turn. But I can’t let them go with one *no* and not say anything about the Church.”

Behind the Scenes

In the Temple Square mission, sisters change companions every six weeks. Unlike some missions where transfers can mean hours on a bus or train to a different city or even country, here, in the smallest mission in the world at just 30 acres (12 hectares), the change may mean simply moving down the hall to another apartment. Planning and leadership are also different. Whereas other missionaries generally plan out each day—where they will work, whom they will visit, what they will teach—the sisters here

have their schedules made for them. The assistants to the president carefully coordinate to ensure that there are enough sisters throughout the grounds to assist visitors at all times, every day. Each zone takes a dif-

ferent preparation day, sisters take meal breaks at varied times, and personal and companionship study often happens during the day rather than in the morning. Because the president, his counselors, and a few senior missionary elders are the only priesthood holders in the mission, all other leadership positions are staffed by the sisters.

“The Best Mission in the World”

The sisters on Temple Square, as most missionaries do, proclaim their mission to be the best in the world. They smile at, greet, and teach thousands of people at Utah’s most popular tourist destination every day. They are motivated by a desire to see all of God’s children come unto Christ. Sister Elisabeth Serna, from Leon Guanajuato, Mexico, says, “I don’t want anybody to say to me, ‘You were there, you saw me walking there, and you didn’t invite me to learn more about the gospel.’ Here we have the commission to invite others to come unto Christ. I want to go home every night and realize that I’ve done everything that I could do, that I have invited as many people as I could to come unto Christ.”

These sisters are much more than simply tour guides. They are a gateway to the gospel for millions of people every year. ■

NOTE

1. *Preach My Gospel* (2004), 1.



TIME LINE

May 1875—President Brigham Young commissions Charles J. Thomas to show tourists around Temple Square. Four thousand people visit Temple Square the first year.

August 1902—A Bureau of Information opens on Temple Square. One hundred and five men and women are called to serve as part-time volunteers. They distribute literature, give information, and conduct tours. More than 150,000 people visit Temple Square during the next year.

1922—Temple Square is designated an official mission of the Church.

1937—344,000 people visit Temple Square.

June 1960—The First Presidency announces that a new Bureau of Information will be built in the northwest corner of Temple Square.

1962—High-fidelity speakers are installed around the Temple Square grounds so tours can be conducted by microphone.

June 1978—South Visitors’ Center dedicated.

1981—Five couples are called as full-time missionaries on Temple Square.

June 1987—Leaders decide to use young sisters as visitors’ center missionaries.

1989—The mission becomes entirely staffed by full-time sister missionaries.

1995—Temple Square mission officially becomes the Utah Salt Lake City Temple Square Mission.