

Today, Patrick and his sons enjoy coming to church together. Many members of their ward strengthened and helped them along the pathway to conversion.





Opening THE Door TO THE Gospel

An invitation was all it took to get Patrick started. Soon many in the ward were helping him to learn about the Church.

By Jacob Aaron Black

Missionary Department

“The priesthood will be strengthened, and we will experience profound success in missionary work and reactivation when ward councils, members, and full-time missionaries are united in the Lord’s purpose,” Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught during the worldwide leadership broadcast on June 23, 2013.¹ Through just such a united effort, the Stansbury Ward of the Stansbury Park Utah Stake experienced this promised success.

Entering the Chapel

It was a warm, late-summer Sunday when Patrick Willoughby decided to visit a nearby Latter-day Saint church. He and his three sons had just moved back from another state to live with his adoptive parents and siblings. Patrick wanted a better life for his boys, and while he wasn’t a member of the Church, he felt that a strong Latter-day Saint community would help them.

A few years before, when Patrick had been living in this same community, he was impressed by his employer’s happy lifestyle and his religious beliefs. His boss had invited him to church, and Patrick had been impressed by the friendliness of the members and the good feelings he felt there. He had occasionally asked his employer questions about the gospel, and was grateful that his boss took the time to answer his questions without pushing his religion on him.

With these memories in mind, Patrick decided to visit the local meetinghouse. Dressed in jeans and carrying a thrift-store copy of the scriptures that his boss had given him years earlier, he opened the door. He found his way to the back of the chapel, where elders quorum meeting was already in progress. The stake high councilor assigned to the ward noticed Patrick and, after the closing prayer, approached him.

“Hi! Are you visiting today?” the high councilor asked.

Patrick explained his recent move.

“Welcome!” the high councilor said. “We’re glad you’re here. Tell me, when you lived here before, were you baptized a member of the Church?”

Each ward council should report on missionary activities and discuss how to support individuals and families who are learning about the Church.



“Uh, no. I wasn’t,” Patrick replied.

“Is that something you might be interested in?” the high councilor asked.

“Maybe,” Patrick said, taking it as an invitation to learn more. “Is there a class or something?”

Receiving an Invitation

The high councilor smiled and said there was indeed such a class. He flagged down the ward mission leader and introduced him to Patrick. The ward mission leader greeted Patrick warmly and invited him to join the Gospel Principles class, which was about to begin. He also asked Patrick if he would like to meet with the missionaries.

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Patrick said.

After the class, Patrick stayed for sacrament meeting, and at the end of the meeting, the ward mission leader introduced Patrick to the bishop. Two days later, the bishop was in Patrick’s home, getting to know Patrick, his parents, siblings, and children.

The ward mission leader sent a text message to the sister missionaries assigned to the ward, passing on Patrick’s information and his desire to meet with them.

The missionaries were elated and quickly made their way to Patrick’s home. What they thought would be an introductory visit quickly became the first lesson. At the end of the lesson, one of the missionaries, Sister Sarah Jane Pratt, felt prompted to invite Patrick to be baptized. Patrick happily accepted her invitation.

Finding Lots of Support

In the weeks that followed, the missionaries taught Patrick and his three boys the missionary lessons. Members of the ward, including the ward mission leader, ward missionaries, and the bishop, attended every lesson. The high councilor continued to reach out to Patrick, inviting him and his boys over for weekly family home evenings. Patrick’s 14-year-old sister, Lindsey, also attended, and she began listening in on the missionary lessons from the other room. Patrick’s testimony of the gospel was growing rapidly, and a seed had been planted in Lindsey’s heart.

Each week in ward council, the bishop and ward council members reported back on their activities with Patrick and his family, and the ward mission leader followed up on and coordinated all the activities under the direction of the bishop. For example:

- The Primary president visited the boys several times and helped them get to know their Primary teachers and make friends in their classes.
- Members of the elders quorum befriended Patrick and helped him feel comfortable at church. They shared their testimonies with him and answered questions about the things the missionaries were teaching him.
- The Young Men president sought out Patrick’s 11-year-old son in anticipation of his upcoming 12th birthday.

Read seven suggestions about how to share the gospel. Go to lds.org/youth/article/share-the-gospel.



Individual members can also bless those who are discovering the gospel, by sharing testimonies and offering reassurance.

The high councilor reported Patrick's progress to the stake presidency, and at stake conference, the stake president made a special effort to introduce himself to Patrick. He encouraged Patrick and his family to continue faithfully studying the gospel with the missionaries.

Because of a transfer in the middle of Patrick's lessons, he was taught by two sets of sister missionaries. They committed Patrick and his sons to be baptized at the end of September. But Patrick was having a difficult time quitting smoking.

Overcoming a Challenge

The missionaries suggested he receive a priesthood blessing to help him overcome this challenge. The following Sunday, now approximately six weeks since Patrick first visited the ward, the bishop, the ward mission leader, the high councilor, and a couple of Patrick's friends from the elders quorum gave him a blessing. He was promised heaven's help in quitting smoking. The high councilor sent Patrick daily text messages supporting him in his efforts to live the Word of Wisdom. Patrick quit smoking for good a few days later.

Soon it was time for the baptism of Patrick and his three sons. The baptismal area at the stake center was full of people who loved and supported Patrick and his boys. Members who had attended the lessons with the missionaries, all four sister missionaries, the bishopric, the ward mission leader, and the stake president were all there

to see the high councilor baptize Patrick and his sons. Patrick's parents, siblings (including Lindsey), and other family members were also present to show their support, despite not yet being members of the Church.

A short time later, Patrick was ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood and had the opportunity to bless the sacrament for the first time.

Supporting His Sister

Following Patrick's baptism, his sister Lindsey felt a strong desire to be baptized herself. The missionaries retaught her the lessons she had listened to from another room, with Patrick providing the powerful supporting testimony of a recent convert.

The Young Women president and the Mia Maid class presidency frequently visited Lindsey at her home and included her in weekly Young Women activities. They invited Lindsey to tour Temple Square with the Young Women president while the rest of the ward's youth participated in baptisms for the dead. Members of the Mia Maid class also greeted and talked to Lindsey when they saw her at school.

Lindsey committed to be baptized, and a few weeks after Patrick's baptism, the ward members, stake leaders, and family gathered again in the stake center to witness Patrick baptize his sister. And the next day, following Lindsey's confirmation, Patrick ordained his son a deacon and they passed the sacrament together.



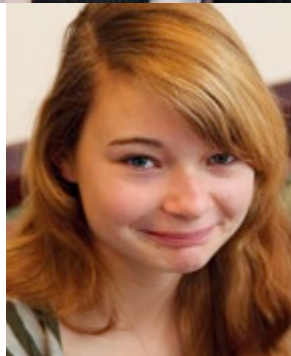
Sharing the Blessings

Since his baptism, Patrick has continued to share his testimony and conversion. He posted pictures from his baptismal service on Facebook. One of his cousins saw the pictures and expressed a desire to find the same happiness Patrick has found.

Six months after his baptism, Patrick was sustained in stake conference to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood and was ordained an elder.

Patrick's stake president commented, "What a wonderful blessing it has been to be a part of Patrick and his family joining the Church. There's great power when the members and leaders of a ward and stake work together in a united effort with the full-time missionaries to bring these children of our Heavenly Father back to Him."

Patrick, dressed in a brand-new suit, shared his feelings about his conversion. "All it took was an invitation," he said about why he chose to meet with the missionaries. "When the high councilor asked me if I had been baptized, that started all this. Now I just



Above: Patrick and his sons after their baptism, with the sister missionaries who taught them. Inset: Patrick's example also led his sister Lindsey to investigate and join the Church.

want to help other people learn about the gospel. It has changed my life."

In this season of hastening of the Lord's work, when we have the largest full-time missionary force in the history of the world, the phrase "every member a missionary" has never been more true. Just ask Patrick Willoughby and his family, who have been blessed eternally by Church members, leaders, and missionaries who opened the gospel door and invited them to enter.

Elder Perry reminded members of the Church: "It is time for us to understand that we—the neighbors, friends, and family of less-active members and nonmembers—are ideally situated to offer an invitation with the proper love and consideration that the one we invite deserves. . . . We do not need, nor should we wait for, an assignment to invite our non-member family, friends, and neighbors to attend church, read the Book of Mormon, or meet with the full-time missionaries." ■

NOTES

1. L. Tom Perry, "Missionary Work in the Digital Age" (worldwide leadership training meeting, June 23, 2013), [lds.org/broadcasts](https://www.lds.org/broadcasts).
2. L. Tom Perry, "Missionary Work in the Digital Age."