

# My Teachers Quorum IS AN MTC



*Working with the young men in my ward has taught me that the new youth curriculum enables missionary training to begin right now.*

**By Russell Wilcox**

After returning from my mission, I had the wonderful opportunity of teaching for nearly two years at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, USA. Every nine weeks my companion teacher and I would stand before a new group of missionaries with smiles on our faces and promise them that choosing to serve a mission was the best decision they had ever made. Over the next few days, those elders and sisters sometimes doubted us as they made the transitions necessary to succeed as full-time missionaries. But by the end of their time at the MTC, most felt well prepared to begin their labor.



## WHAT YOUTH SAY ABOUT *COME, FOLLOW ME*

How can *Come, Follow Me* help youth prepare for a mission? I asked several teenagers in my ward and received these enthusiastic responses:



"Since Primary, I've been learning the doctrines and principles of the Church. But I never realized what a challenge it is for missionaries to teach the basic principles and concepts of the gospel simply and effectively. The new curriculum helps me to practice that." —Seth L.

## Use Time Wisely

When President Thomas S. Monson made the historic announcement lowering the ages for missionary service (see "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign*, Nov. 2012, 4–5), a former companion teacher contacted me and expressed concern about the shortened time elders and sisters would spend in the MTC. He said, "We barely had enough time as it was. What will they do now?"

I felt differently. "The way I see it," I replied, "their preparation time has not really been shortened. It has actually been lengthened because of the new youth curriculum, *Come, Follow Me*." I shared with him some of the

experiences I have had in working with the teachers quorum in my ward in San Antonio, Texas, USA. My friend quickly understood how time spent in Young Men, Young Women, and Sunday School, as well as in our homes, can actually provide additional preparation prior to the time spent in the MTC. This can effectively create extensions of the MTC in the quorum, class, and family.

We also discussed how three effective methods we used in the MTC can help young people as we implement *Come, Follow Me*: (1) practice with feedback, (2) ask open-ended questions, and (3) follow up on commitments.





"In our classes we've been practicing how to respond when someone asks us about the Church. Then the other day one of my friends asked me! Instead of not knowing what to say, I remembered some of the things we've been learning. I was able to answer all of his questions. The new curriculum is helping me to be a missionary right now." —Jared M.



"At first it seemed like we were going over the same doctrine for several lessons in a row. But by the end of the first month I realized that several lessons aren't enough to scratch the surface of everything I need to learn. Learning to love learning is great preparation for a mission." —Daedra L.

### Practice with Feedback

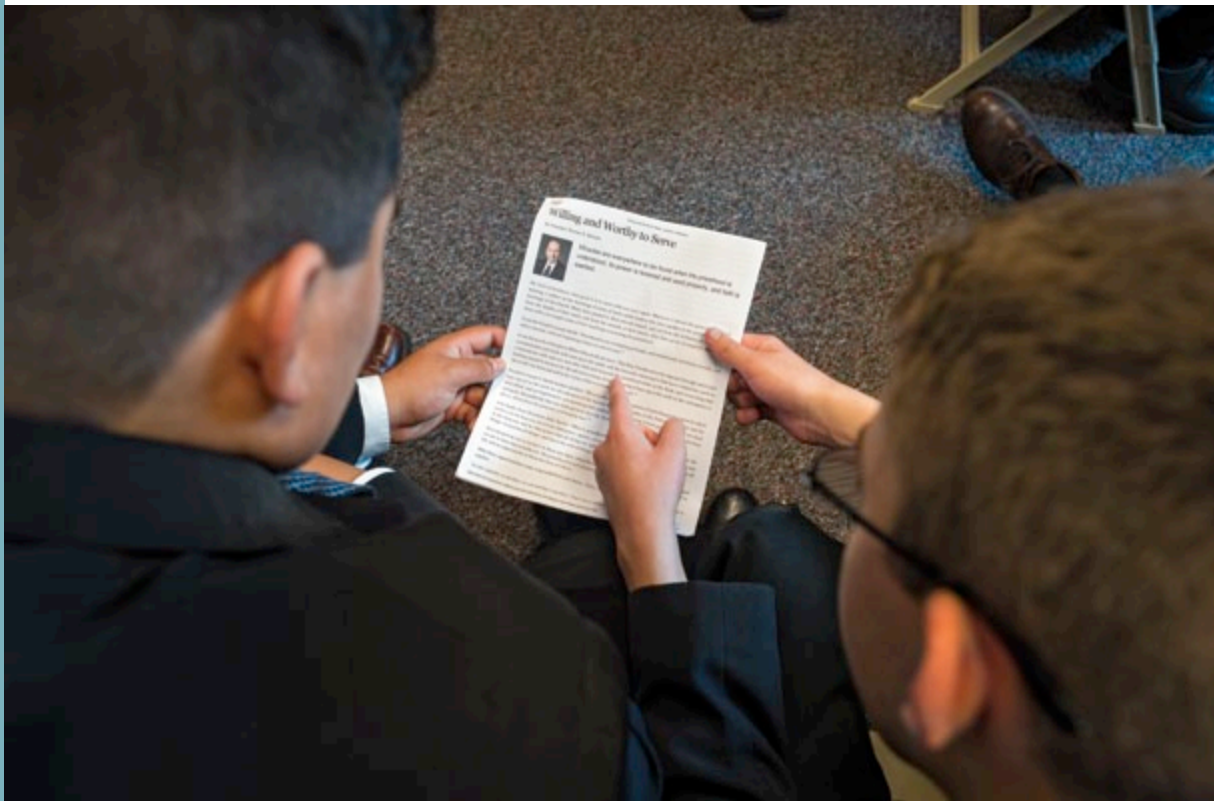
Soon after I returned from my mission, the children in my ward presented the annual Primary program in sacrament meeting. As I listened, I realized that I had also learned many wonderful principles in Primary but that it was when I was required to *teach* those principles to others that I fully internalized them.

In the MTC, missionaries prepare to teach by teaching. They teach each other, their teachers, and missionaries in other districts. They teach members of their branch presidencies and volunteers from the community, both members and people not of our faith. Most important, after they teach they receive feedback.

As part of *Come, Follow Me*, youth have the opportunity to share with others what they have learned. This can happen during informal discussions, but it can also

happen more formally. In our quorum we have created opportunities for the young men to join in teaching each other in our meetings, but we have also arranged for them to teach short lessons in Primary (under the direction of the regular teacher) and to participate in teaching their peers in other quorums and classes. The boys even made a video about preparing for a mission and posted it on the Internet.

In preparation for each of these teaching experiences, the young men have received feedback from me and other adults, as well as from each other. We have offered sincere compliments and made suggestions as to how they might improve. In the MTC we would explain, demonstrate, practice, evaluate, and then practice again. I am trying to do the same thing with the youth, and it is having positive results.



## PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES



"If we provide our young people with teaching opportunities, encouraging them not to be ashamed of the gospel, we will help them greatly."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, in "Tending the Flock: Teaching Leadership Skills to Youth," *Ensign*, June 2008, 18.



"My teacher asked me to help teach a part of the lesson about the Atonement. At first I thought, 'Wait a minute, you're the teacher.' But as I thought about it more, I realized that learning to teach with the Spirit is the best mission preparation."

—Brandon L.

## Ask Open-Ended Questions

In the MTC we avoided questions for which there is only one correct answer ("Where did Joseph Smith go to pray?") and questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no ("Have you ever felt like Joseph Smith?"). The quality and quantity of responses always increased when we asked open-ended questions for which there are many possible answers ("How has God answered your prayers?" "What scriptures have motivated you to do something?").

In my teachers quorum, not only am I trying to invite more thinking and participation by asking open-ended questions, but I am also encouraging the young men to ask open-ended questions of others when they are leading discussions. When teaching about the Godhead, one young man asked, "What is the Holy Ghost?" After an awkward silence, another young man finally stated, "The third member of the Godhead."

I then joined the conversation and asked the first young man to build on his original question by asking an open-ended question. He thought for a moment and then asked, "What if we didn't have the Holy Ghost? What difference would that make?" The discussion that followed was much more lively and meaningful. In the MTC we taught missionaries to use open-ended questions. I am trying to teach the young men to do the same thing, and they are catching on.

## Follow Up on Commitments

In *Preach My Gospel*, missionaries learn the importance of inviting their investigators to make commitments and then following up and making sure they keep them. At the end of the learning outlines in *Come, Follow Me*, teachers are encouraged to invite learners to make a commitment. That's simple enough, but we also have to follow up and make sure the commitments are kept.



"I feel a lot more involved in what we are learning now. The other day in class I sat back and thought, 'I bet study time on a mission will be a lot like this.' That got me excited because when I'm involved in learning it's a lot more fun." —Christian S.





## TEACH ONE ANOTHER

"You teenagers, embrace your new curriculum and teach one another the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Now is your time to prepare to teach others about the goodness of God."

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Catch the Wave," *Ensign*, May 2013, 45.

In one of my lessons I invited the young men to ask their parents to share a time when they had received an answer to prayer. The following week I asked the young men, "How many of you did it?" No hands went up. Instead of just moving on, I extended the same invitation again and promised the boys they would have a special experience with their parents and probably learn something they never knew before. I promised them that this experience would increase their testimony of prayer and would help them recognize answers in their own lives. The young men recommitted, and during the week I contacted the boys and reminded them. I assured them I would be asking them to share something about their experiences on Sunday. When Sunday came, everyone was prepared, and

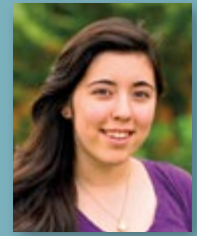
the stories they shared allowed us to feel the Spirit in a memorable way.

Some may ask, "How will missionaries be prepared if the time in the MTC is shortened?" Those involved with implementing *Come, Follow Me* are realizing that young people today have the opportunity to be better prepared than ever. As I have implemented in the teachers quorum some of the same effective methods I used in the MTC, it has made a difference. Practicing with feedback, asking open-ended questions, and following up on commitments have helped make our time together much more productive. ■

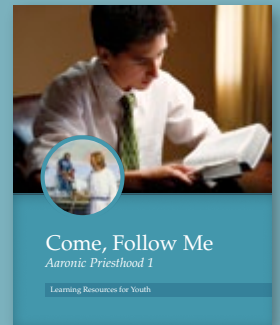
*The author lives in Texas, USA.*

## MORE INFO

**F**ind information and resources related to *Come, Follow Me* at [youth.lds.org](http://youth.lds.org).



"It has been fun to learn together as a class and then share what I'm learning with my family. I like to write to my brother, who is currently serving a mission, and explain the things we are learning." —Stephanie S.



*Come, Follow Me* is helping the youth in my ward respond to the statement from the First Presidency, "We challenge you to rise to a new sense of commitment to assist our Father in Heaven in His glorious work" (*Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* [2004], v).

## FIVE STEPS TO BETTER TEACHING

This five-step process is used in the Missionary Training Center, and I have also found it beneficial in helping my quorum learn how to teach gospel principles. Leaders and teachers may find it helpful as they involve youth in the classroom, and parents may find it useful in the home.

1. Explain
2. Demonstrate
3. Practice
4. Evaluate
5. Practice again

Evaluation is particularly helpful for youth. Kindhearted feedback about what they did right and how they can improve helps them to become better teachers.