

# Three Modern Pioneer Journeys

By Sarah Keenan

While I was serving my mission in Melbourne, Australia, I was in a ward that was made up of international students. When they were learning about pioneers in Sunday School, I wondered how interested they would be—they were almost all recent converts, and none of them had any ancestors who crossed the plains of North America.

Surprisingly, many of the international students were captivated by the stories shared. Some of them mentioned how they related to the early Saints on a personal level: just like the pioneers, these international students were new converts and had made sacrifices to establish the Church in the areas they lived in. For some of these members, the Church was either small or nonexistent in their homeland. They were modern pioneers, forging

a new religious heritage for future generations.

Here are three experiences from converts who have joined the ranks of modern pioneers.

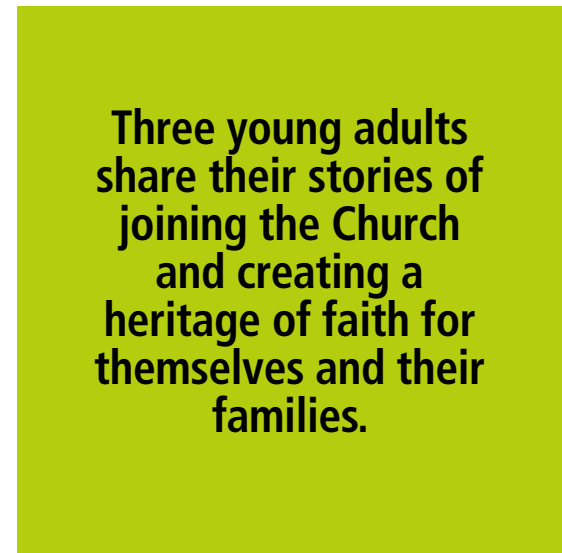
## HONORING MY FAMILY IN NEW WAYS

Nami Chan, Taoyuan, Taiwan

My family and a lot of my extended family in Taiwan are Buddhist.

When I was young, I remember helping prepare sacrifices for ancestors and multiple gods on Chinese New Year and other holidays. It was a family tradition for us, as well as a way to commemorate our ancestors and bring peace and prosperity to my family.

When some of my relatives joined a nondenominational Christian church,



it had no impact on my family at first. But during the Ching Ming Festival, when you worship ancestors and burn incense at their graves, my Christian relatives refused to participate. They said that they were committed to following the Ten Commandments, particularly "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). My family had not



discussed any other beliefs before, but from that day on, Christianity represented the destruction of traditions in my family's eye and was seen in a negative light.

When I was attending a university, I met LDS missionaries on the street. Normally, I wouldn't have been interested in what they had to say, but some experiences had readied my heart to receive their message. While meeting with them, I agreed to pray and read the Book of Mormon, and I began developing a personal testimony of what I was being taught. But, because of my parent's feelings against Christianity, I didn't want to tell them I wanted to be baptized. Many months after my first meeting with the missionaries, I finally told my parents that I wanted to

get baptized and that I wanted to serve a mission. They were upset, but I knew I was making the right choice.

I don't have any pioneer ancestry, but I do feel like I understand their sacrifice. It is difficult to give up some traditions and face opposition from family members. Even now, five years after I joined the Church, in which time I have served a mission, my family doesn't completely support my decision, but they've come to accept it. Joining the Church has allowed me to honor my family in new ways, by doing family history and researching my ancestors. My testimony of Jesus Christ and His Atonement help me in resolving any conflict I may have with my family.

## FINDING JOY FROM THE GOSPEL

Harry Guan, Utah, USA

I grew up in China and considered myself a Christian, despite the fact that I never actually went to church. I was interested in God and Jesus Christ, and I thought Christian doctrine was very comforting.

When I moved to the United States for college, I started attending a

nondenominational Christian church. After a few months, I heard about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from some friends who were considering attending Brigham Young University. I asked a few students at the Christian church about the Latter-day Saints and was surprised when they fervently warned me to stay away from the “Mormons.” I listened to their advice at first, but as I was scrolling through social media about a week later, I came across an address by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In the talk, he mentioned that members of the Church should be respectful to other religions (see “Faith, Family, and Religious Freedom,” [lds.org/prophets-and-apostles](https://www.lds.org/prophets-and-apostles)). As I listened to Elder Holland, I felt what I now know as the Spirit and decided that I needed to learn more about the Church.

I ended up going to church and later met with missionaries. I was touched by their teachings, particularly the plan of salvation.

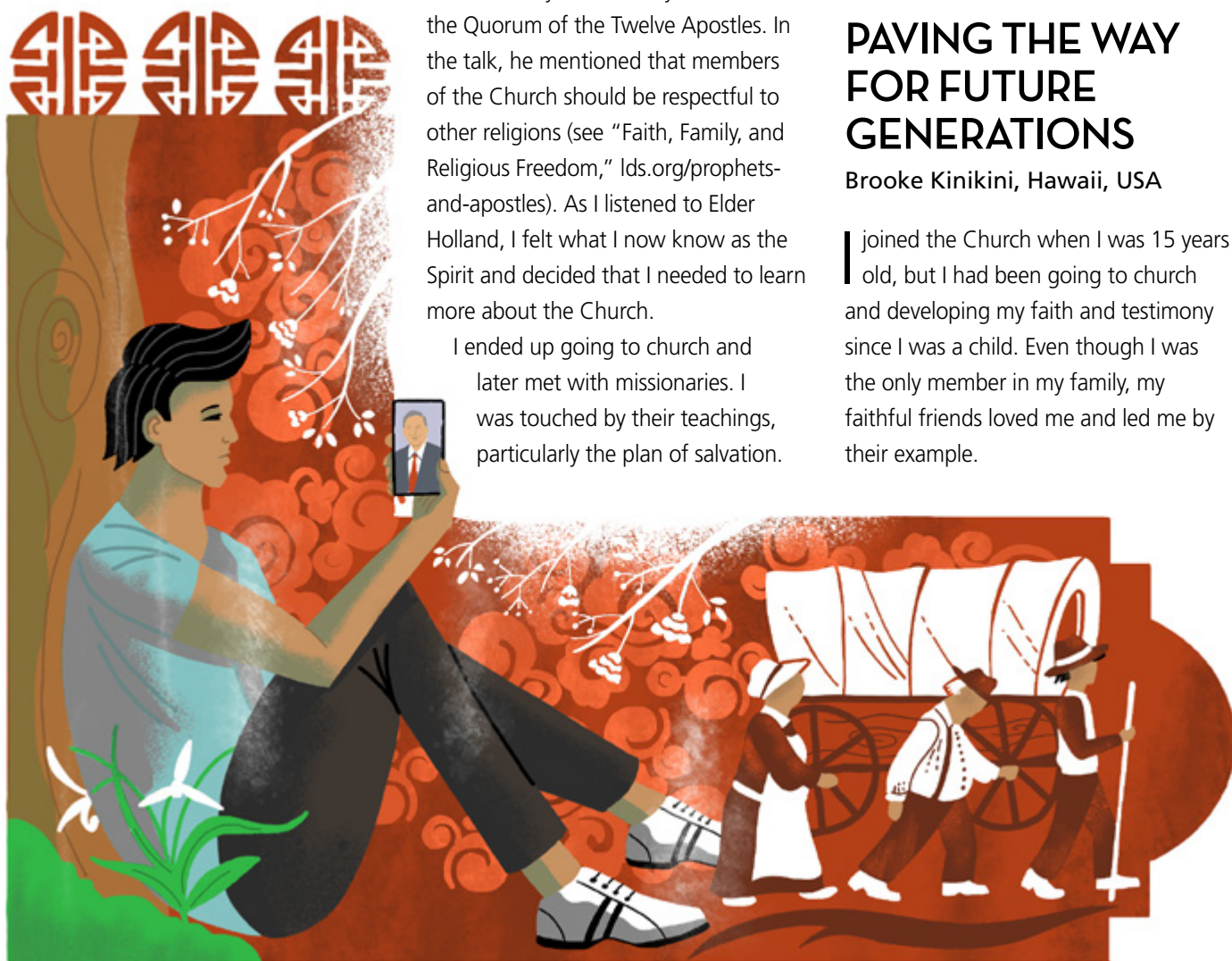
My parents weren’t too happy when I decided to be baptized, but they accepted that I was old enough to make my own decisions. When my grandparents visited me in America a few months later, I was able to teach them about the gospel. They both decided to be baptized.

The gospel has brought me so much joy and it has led me to my soon-to-be wife. It is worth every sacrifice I have had to make or will make.

## PAVING THE WAY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Brooke Kinikini, Hawaii, USA

I joined the Church when I was 15 years old, but I had been going to church and developing my faith and testimony since I was a child. Even though I was the only member in my family, my faithful friends loved me and led me by their example.

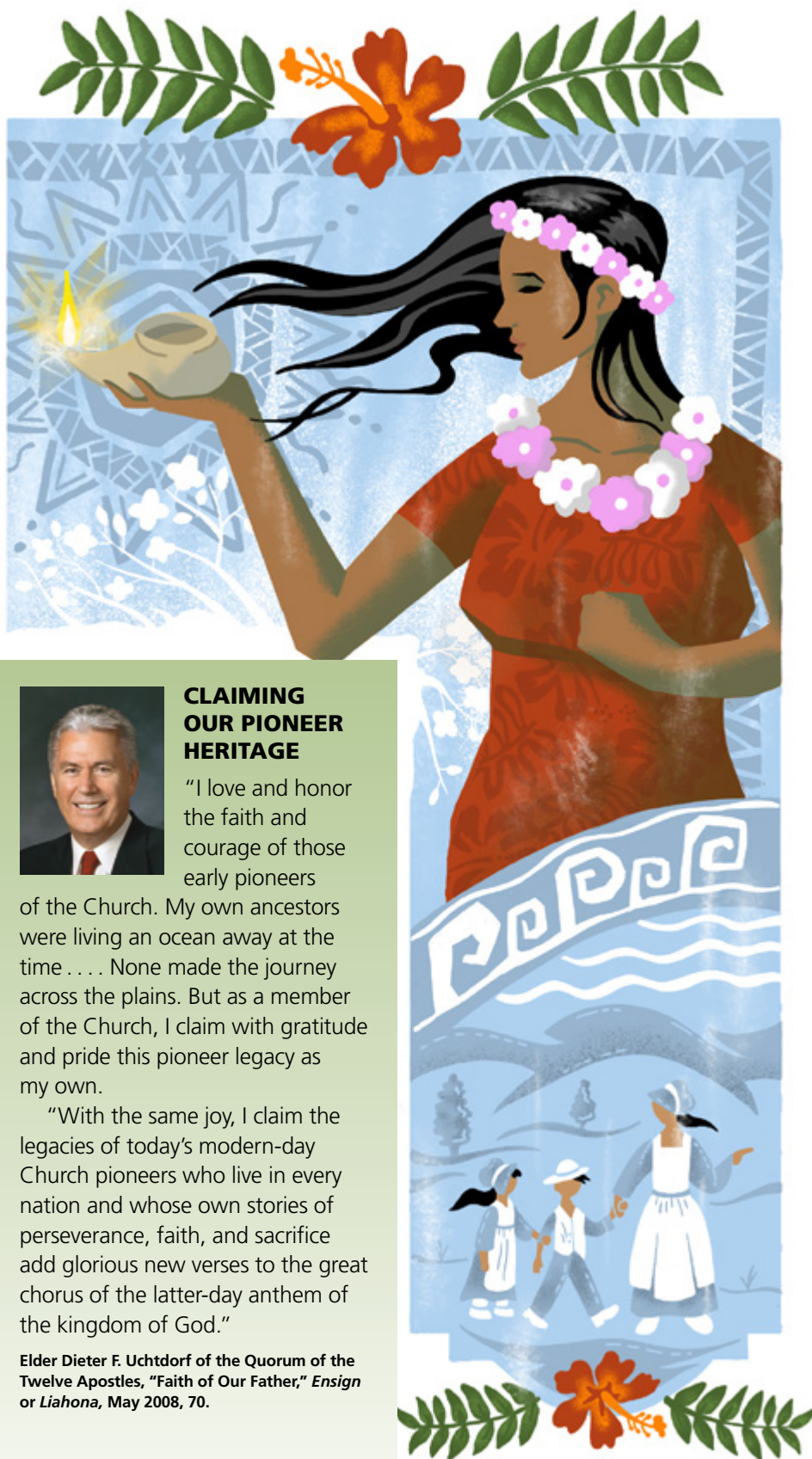


Unlike the pioneers of old, I never had to trudge with a handcart across the frozen plains. In fact, I didn't face many hardships at all when joining the Church. Sure, I lost some friends and I had to attend church alone and go to seminary by myself. But when I think about the impact it has had and continues to have on my family, I know that it was one of the best decisions I ever made. My decision to be baptized, to be sealed in the temple, and to remain faithful to my covenants has created a chain reaction that will positively impact the lives of my three beautiful children, as well as future generations, forever.

Being a pioneer is about paving the way for others. I like to think that one of the many blessings I've received for being a faithful member of the Church is that I can help bring others unto Christ. A seemingly small event—like the baptism of a 15-year-old girl in Maui, Hawaii, or the humble prayer of a 14-year-old boy in a grove—can change the lives of families in the past, present, and future.

The modern title of pioneer isn't just reserved for converts. As we seek to build a lasting heritage of faithfulness for future generations, we can all become pioneers. ■

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*



### CLAIMING OUR PIONEER HERITAGE

"I love and honor the faith and courage of those early pioneers

of the Church. My own ancestors were living an ocean away at the time . . . None made the journey across the plains. But as a member of the Church, I claim with gratitude and pride this pioneer legacy as my own.

"With the same joy, I claim the legacies of today's modern-day Church pioneers who live in every nation and whose own stories of perseverance, faith, and sacrifice add glorious new verses to the great chorus of the latter-day anthem of the kingdom of God."

**Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Faith of Our Father," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 70.**