

# STILL CALLED TO **SERVE**

*Even though I was honorably excused from a full-time mission, I was able to serve in a meaningful way.*

BY PETER JAMES MARRELLI

As a boy and a young man, I prepared to serve a full-time proselytizing mission for the Church. Like Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counseled us, I wanted to *be* a missionary, not just to *go* on a mission.<sup>1</sup> But because of my medical challenges, the Missionary Department informed me that it was not in my best interest to face the stress of a full-time mission. Although it would have been easy to become bitter, I had prepared to serve my Savior, and I was prepared to accept His will for me.

## **My Opportunity**

What happened to me is called being honorably excused. That means that Church leaders saw my worthiness and my desire to serve but encouraged me to serve in other ways. Like many others who cannot serve a full-time mission, I felt prompted to do more than just “get on with my life.” I wanted to serve, so I did—as a local Church-service missionary. With help from my bishop and stake president, I found a way to serve the Lord while living at home.

There was a need at the Church’s Audiovisual Department, and since

I live near the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City, I could help. My stake president extended a call, set me apart, and developed special rules for me during my year of service. Though the rules seemed strict to me, I learned that I was blessed when I followed them. While other service missionaries with different stake



**Whether I was winding cable or helping with broadcasts, my Church-service mission helped me build confidence and a sense of respect. I felt the Lord's influence and help in doing difficult and demanding things.**

presidents may have different rules, these were the ones I followed:

1. Stick to a daily schedule: arise at 6:30 a.m.; study the scriptures and *Preach My Gospel* for two hours each day; exercise for 30 minutes each day; go to bed at 10:30 p.m.
2. Follow the Church's dress code.
3. Listen to classical or Church music only.
4. Limit computer use to e-mail; limited television viewing; no video games.
5. Participate only in group activities—no dating.
6. Have monthly interviews with my bishop.

Sometimes when I was down in a crawl space under a building in 100-degree heat (38°C) winding up cable all day, I found

myself wondering what it had to do with bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (see Moses 1:39). Was I really part of the team sharing the gospel around the world? I knew that Mosiah 2:17 says that



when we are in the service of our fellow beings we are in the service of God, but it took me a while to believe that was true.

I learned that just like a proselytizing mission, a service mission isn't about you. It is about learning to do what the Lord needs done. During my service, I helped set up and take down lights, run sound for meetings, and transport equipment. It was hard, dirty work, and I will never take general conference for granted. In fact, now when I watch any broadcast, my whole body aches because I know the intense work involved.

#### **It's about Work**

During my Church-service mission, I learned the importance of punctuality, responsibility, doing the job right, and giving my best effort. While my parents had tried to teach me these things, I didn't understand until I saw how wasting time and effort can directly affect the work of others. Before my mission, it was easy to focus on just having fun. But once you are on your mission, you realize it will not be fun to be the companion who doesn't know how to work. Part of preparing to serve is learning how to work.

#### **What Else I Learned**

I also learned to appreciate those who work behind the scenes. I saw how hard Church leaders work without drawing attention to themselves or expecting special treatment. I saw others serving who had



LEFT: PHOTOGRAPHS BY WELDEN C. ANDERSEN; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW REIER, CHRISTINA SMITH, AND ROBERT CASEY. POSED BY MODELS

## OTHER WAYS TO SERVE

Because of health problems or other circumstances, some people cannot serve a full-time proselytizing mission. If you have been excused from full-time missionary service but would like to serve the Lord in some other way, ask your bishop or branch president to discuss the possibilities with you. He and the stake or district president can help you find Church-service mission opportunities in your area. Some places you might serve include:



- **A seminary or institute**, working in an office, at a reception desk, or as computer support.
- **A welfare facility**, such as a cannery, bishops' storehouse, Deseret Industries, employment center, or other welfare facility.
- **A Church-owned farm or ranch**, doing chores or clerical work.
- **A meetinghouse**, helping with building maintenance.

Outside of your Church-service mission hours, you can also serve by performing baptisms for the dead.

By serving in the Church, you show your love for the Lord and your commitment to your baptismal covenant. And service helps build the Lord's kingdom on earth.



greater challenges than I did, teaching me that everyone can serve in some way.

I realized that I have been blessed with strengths and abilities and that through hard work I could do more than I had been doing. I learned that as I respect other people, I like myself better. It's easy to get in the habit of looking down on people in order to try to feel better about ourselves. But respect works both ways, and those who represent Jesus Christ must be respectful.

The most important lesson I learned, however, was that the Lord will help you do difficult things. It was hard

to stay home, hard to do menial chores, hard not to be the center of attention, hard to obey mission rules, and hard to hear people tell me I wasn't on a "real" mission. But the Lord helped me. I know He will help you do the things you need to do to be happy, to feel good about yourself, to grow, and to be a better person. Get down on your knees, bow your head, and be honest with yourself as you pray. Then get ready to serve wherever and whenever you are called. **NE**

### NOTE

1. See "Becoming a Missionary," *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 44.