

From
REFUGEE to
MISSIONARY



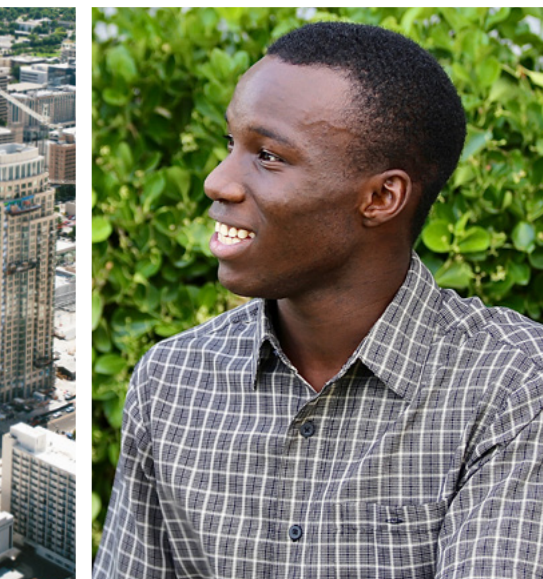
Born as a refugee in Africa, Joshua now brings the gospel to spiritual refugees.





“In the second camp, life was no easier. . . . We were poor. We were desperate. All we could do was pray.”





By Richard M. Romney

Church Magazines

One night not too long ago, Joshua Mana, who would soon turn 18, was talking with his parents about the years their family spent in refugee camps.

“The camps are not where you would wish to live,” his father Fredrick said, “because of the hardship.”

The first camp was on the eastern border of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The family, fleeing war and genocide to the west, lived there for two years. Shelter was poor, food scarce, and illness common.

“That is where your brother Patric died when he was just 11 years old,” Fredrick said. “We were sad in that place.”

The second camp was south across the border, in Zambia.

“That’s where you were born,” his mother Esperance said. “We named you Joshua, like the righteous prophet in the Bible. To me you will always be Joshua, a gift from God, because even in the camps God was with us.”

All We Could Do Was Pray

In the second camp, life was no easier. “Sometimes we were able to find jobs, but only as volunteers,” Fredrick explained. “Maybe they gave you food, maybe a little bit of money at the end of the month. But in a refugee camp, even that is a lot. With a few friends, we worked together, and some were able to leave for France, Canada, and other countries.” And Joshua’s family—his mother and father, two older sisters, and himself—were able to move to a one-room apartment in Lusaka, where they scraped by.

“We knew there was a resettlement program,” Esperance said. “But we had no hope. People will take your application, but if you don’t have money to give them, they just trash it. We were poor. We were desperate. All we could do was pray.”

A friend in France kept writing letters and making appeals on their behalf. Then one day, after four years of waiting, their names showed up on a list of those approved for resettlement. It was a miracle!

There was just one catch. “We would be going directly to Salt Lake City, Utah, USA,” Esperance said. “We knew a little about big cities like New York, but we didn’t know Salt Lake City. ‘Are you sure this is in the USA?’ we asked. ‘Yes, yes,’ the official said. ‘Somewhere in USA.’”

Made to Feel Welcome

“We didn’t expect any help when we got to Utah,” Fredrick said. “But that’s not what happened.”

“The first person we met made us feel welcome,” Esperance recalled. “She came with her family to visit our apartment. They saw how we ate, how we slept, what we worried about. It was the first time someone was concerned about how they could help.”

“She and her husband were like parents to us,” Fredrick said. “They helped us learn about the customs of this new country. They helped us find work.”

“We could tell they were Christians, and we were Christians, too,” Esperance said. “We asked if we could learn about their Church.”

And learn they did. Soon they were meeting regularly with the missionaries. “Each teaching made sense to us, especially what they called the great plan of happiness,” Esperance said. “I cried and cried when they told us we could be together as a family in eternity, and that we would see Patric again. We knew it was true.”

Fredrick and Esperance were baptized and confirmed. Joshua was baptized when he turned eight. And Joshua and Patric have been sealed to their parents, giving them the opportunity to be together when this life is through. Other family members are still learning about the gospel.



The RM Example

As a member of the Church, Joshua was particularly impressed with a certain group of young adults. “At first, I wasn’t sure what an ‘RM’ was. But the more I watched returned missionaries, and whenever I spent time around one of them, I knew I wanted to be one too,” he recalls.

Year after year, the returned missionaries impressed him. When he came of age, Joshua met with his bishop, submitted his application, and waited to receive his mission call.

That’s when, one Sunday, half a dozen refugees who are returned missionaries—and also friends with Joshua—gathered in the cultural hall after church to counsel with him.

One of them, Madelaine Lamah, who served in the New York New York South Mission, said her mission

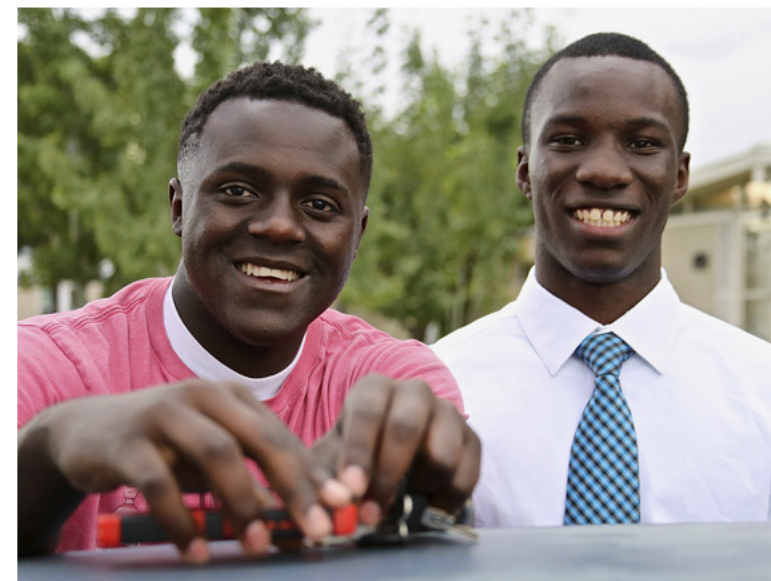
motto was “Forever Changed.” She reminded Joshua that joining the Church changed his family’s life and that he would be an instrument of change for others as he shared the gospel with them.

Jean-Pierre Benimana, who served in the California Los Angeles Mission, reminded Joshua that “the happiest people on earth are those who live the gospel of Jesus Christ with all their hearts.”

The returned missionaries were refugees from countries like Burundi and Rwanda, in Africa, and Burma, in Asia. They have served in places like Los Angeles, California, and Birmingham, Alabama, in the USA, and in western African countries like Benin and Côte d’Ivoire. They were blessed to receive the gospel, and they were equally blessed to share it. Now they explained to Joshua that he was about to become a part of that legacy.

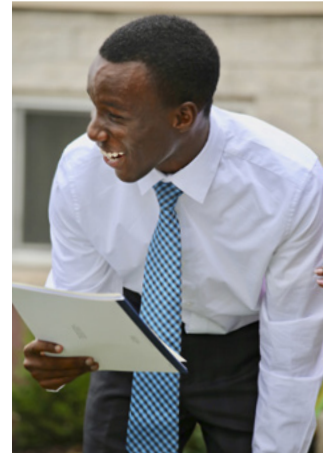


To learn more about refugees and how to help them, go to lds.org/refugees.



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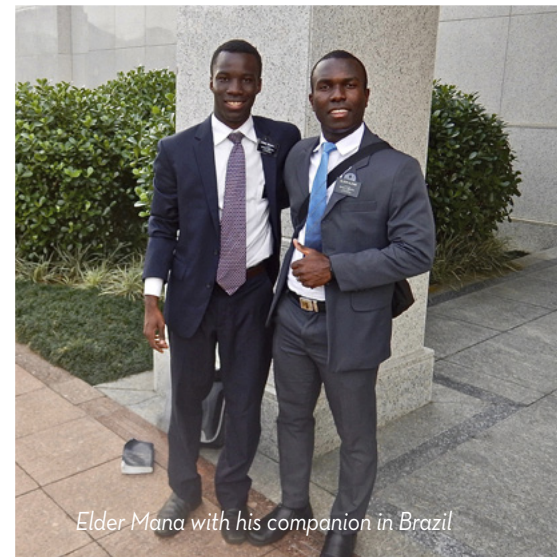


The Joy of the Call

A few weeks later, a big, white envelope arrived in the mail. Another group gathered, this time at Fredrick and Esperance's home. The group included family, LDS friends and neighbors, and some friends from other faiths.

Joshua, dressed in a white shirt and tie, stood up, opened the envelope, and read, "Dear Elder Mana: You are hereby called to serve as a missionary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. You are assigned to labor in the Brazil Porto Alegre South Mission . . ."

There were cheers, tears, hugs, but most of all, joy. Then there was a brief moment for Elder Mana to speak.



Elder Mana with his companion in Brazil

Freely Give

He quoted a scripture he has learned to love: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

Then he shared his testimony: "The gospel has changed my life so much because it helps me to know that Father in Heaven has a plan for us, and if we follow His commandments we can go back to Him again one day. Every day I follow the Holy Ghost. He prompts me what to do, because there's lots of work that Father in Heaven needs me to do to build His kingdom.

"Being a missionary is part of that, as well. My purpose in going on a mission is to bring people to Christ and give them the gospel."

It's a testimony he will share freely, and often, with the people of Brazil. **NE**

Transforming Lives

Elder Mana served faithfully in Brazil for seven months and then developed a serious illness and had to come home. He hopes to return to full-time missionary service when he recovers. "I love being a missionary," he says. "The best part is when you see people embrace the gospel and watch how Heavenly Father transforms their lives."