

# MISSIONARY MAIL

BY CONNIE MYERS

*What should we write about? How do we get it there? What should we send?*

**N**o matter where they are serving, missionaries love mail. Letters and packages from friends and family reassure missionaries that they haven't been forgotten while they are away from home serving the Lord. Where it is available, missionaries are also authorized to communicate with their families by e-mail.

But what should we at home write about? What kinds of letters and e-mails do missionaries most enjoy? What are they hoping to find when they open a package from home? How can we best support missionaries?

## Messages from Family and Friends

When you write to missionaries, tell them the important things that are happening in your life with school, family, and the gospel. Write as though you were talking to them face to face.

"I think it is very important to receive letters that are related to the gospel and the work of the missionary," says Devin McCabe, who served in the Brazil Campinas Mission. "Keep your sense of humor, but stay focused on the true nature of missionary work. The more encouraged a missionary can be, the better the work will go."

"Friends should write about spiritual or missionary experiences they've had in order to keep up the enthusiasm of their missionary," says Elder Jesse Rock, serving in the Mexico Guadalajara South Mission. "They shouldn't write about gossipy little things like who likes who or the party they went to last week. Those are a distraction."

If you dated someone who is now serving a mission,

make your letters friendly and encouraging, but not romantic. You can help missionaries focus on the work of the Lord with uplifting letters and reassurance that they are where they need to be. Avoid romantic allusions.

"Write about the blessings that you have received through his mission," advises Eric Elggren, who served in the Brazil Londrina Mission. "Write about what you are doing to help the missionaries at home."

Here are some more ideas.

### Things to ask about

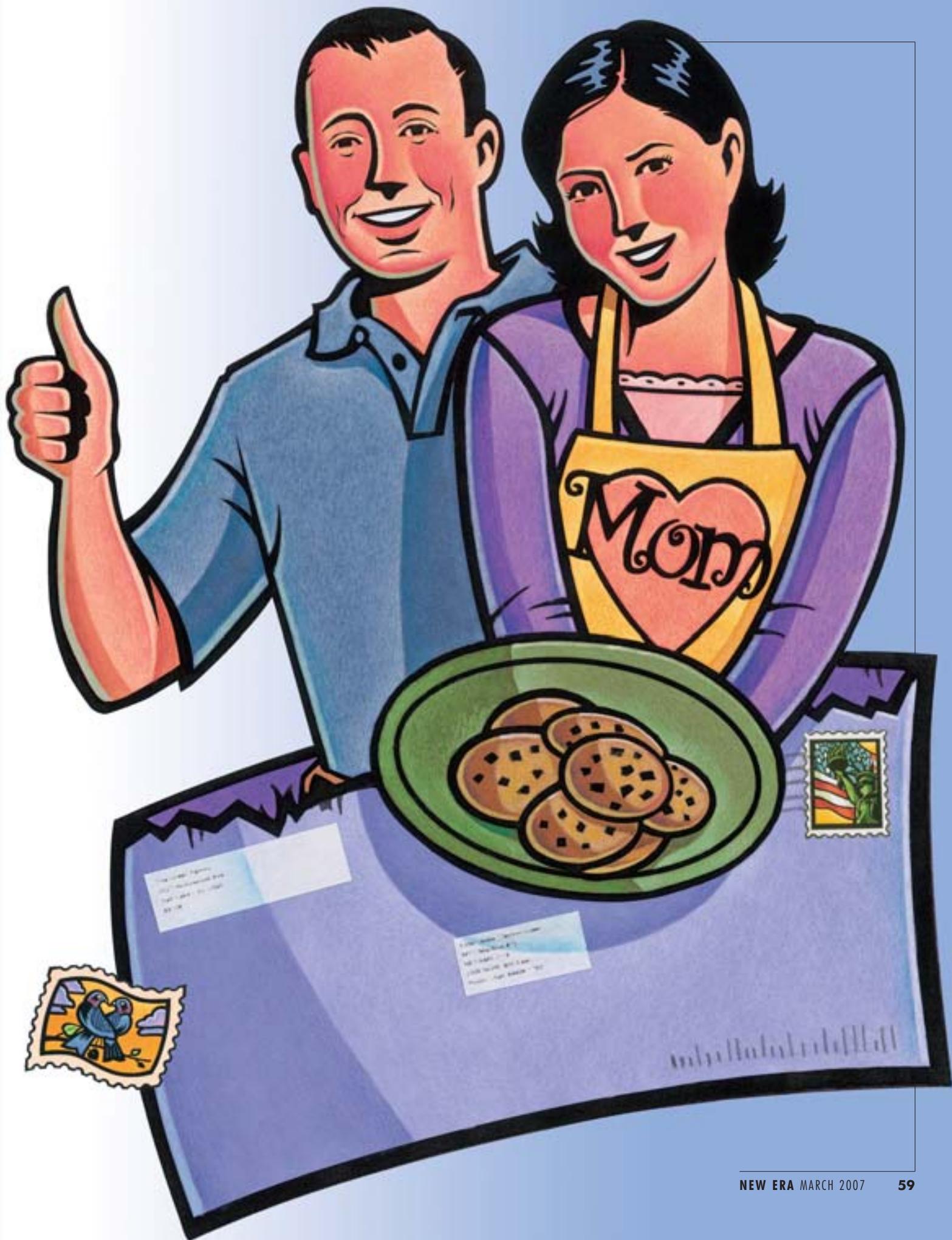
- The work, the schedule, the culture, and the experiences of your missionaries.
- Who your missionaries are teaching. When they tell you the names of their investigators, follow up in your next message and ask about them by name.

### Things to share

- Insights you've gained in seminary or Sunday lessons.
- A scripture you've found meaningful.
- Testimony-building experiences you have had.
- News about mutual friends who are also serving missions.

### Things to avoid

- Don't ask how many baptisms missionaries have had. The people in some missions are more receptive to the gospel than others. Encourage them in their work as they plant and spread the seeds of the gospel.
- Don't criticize missionaries, even if they haven't written back to you.
- Don't mention every problem that arises at home.



**M**issionaries love packages.

*But it's especially nice when the family remembers to include a small item or two for the companion.*

*The New Era asked a few returned missionaries about items they appreciated receiving that were useful and still reminded them of home. Here are some suggestions:*

- Socks
- Familiar-tasting toothpaste
- Dry drink mix
- Seasoning packets
- Recipes for simple dishes
- Gift certificates to chain restaurants (only if mailed in the same country)
- Letters from younger siblings, cousins, or Primary children
- A favorite treat

There are some problems they should know about, but there are many others that would only worry or distract them unnecessarily.

#### **Good Things in Small Packages**

Missionaries love receiving thoughtful packages from friends and family back home, but make sure to honor the guidelines of their mission. Some missions discourage packages, and some ask for restraint on food, music, and other items. In considering what to send missionaries,

remember that they often have limited time and budgets for shopping. Favorite food items from home may not be available in their fields of service. And receiving a package tells missionaries that someone back home is thinking of them.

Remember to keep your gifts simple. "Keep the packages small. Make sure the contents are economical and not extravagant," says Aaron Turner, who served in the Mexico Guadalajara Mission. "Remember that for every package sent, there's a companion that probably didn't get one." He suggests including an extra item for your missionary's companion.

If your missionary is serving in another country, customs fees can be very expensive. Some missionaries report paying \$200 or more in fees to pick up Christmas packages. These high fees are more common than you might think. Check before sending off a box to a missionary abroad.





## MISSIONARY E-MAIL

Missionaries are allowed to communicate with their families by e-mail. Their mission presidents set the specific guidelines for their e-mail use. Here are some general guidelines missionaries follow:

- They may use e-mail only on preparation day.
- They may use computers in public facilities such as libraries or appropriate commercial outlets.
- Companions should always be together while using a computer.
- They should not impose on Church members who may have computers.
- They should pay any cost for using e-mail.
- They should exercise caution in the content and language of the e-mail, making certain that no confidential or sensitive information is included.

Due to limited resources, missionary training centers do not provide e-mail service for missionaries.

(See *Missionary Handbook* [2006], 20–21.)

Missionaries enjoy receiving Church materials both for personal use and for investigators. Mormon Tabernacle Choir music, Church pictures, Church stickers, pictures of the Savior, and bookmarks are all popular items. But remember to consider the circumstances of the mission. For example, in some areas, people may not have electricity, let alone a CD player. Also, in hot climates, some food items may melt.

Other thoughts:

- Some items may be less expensive to purchase in the mission. Doing this will also help avoid theft and customs fees.
- Missionaries must pack everything they own into two suitcases for transfers. Bulky items may be thrown away or left behind.
- Record your testimony and send it to your missionary.

- Don't send books. Missionaries have the Church basics they need. Extra books are not approved and add weight to their already full suitcases.
- Don't send toys or games. Missionaries have plenty to do on their preparation days.
- Don't send cash through the mail. It is illegal to send cash internationally. Even within your own country's borders, cash is often lost in transit.

### Post Script

Having a friend or a sibling out on a mission can be a great experience for you, too. What's the best thing you can do at home to support your missionary?

"Pray. Write good, supporting, spiritual letters. And pray some more," says Jesse Rock, who served in the Mexico Guadalajara South Mission. "Prayers that are offered for missionaries are felt and received with gratitude."

"Pray for them. Keep in touch with them," says Sister Kathryn Kane, serving in the Nevada Las Vegas Mission. "Most of all, while your friends are serving missions, you too should be doing things to help yourself grow spiritually."

Your missionaries are growing from their daily experiences. Create opportunities for growth in your own life. Serve your ward members through a Church calling or through acts of service. Pray and read your scriptures each day. Participate in temple work with family history research or proxy baptisms. Look for opportunities to share the gospel with those you meet each day.

"Love them, support them, and send them pictures!" says Elder Ryan Malone, serving in the Knoxville Tennessee Mission. "Pictures from home are like a lifeline. They really are worth a thousand words."

Though missionaries love receiving letters from home, they can't answer every letter they receive. Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back regularly. Continue to write. Know that missionaries value your words and thoughts and prayers as they continue in service to the Lord. **NE**

Find additional ideas in Q&A, *New Era*, Feb. 1997, p. 17.