

How to Be a Great Member Missionary

Now that missionary work centers in wards and branches, what can members do to be better missionaries? Here are some ideas from Latter-day Saints in British Columbia, Canada.

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Church Magazines

Sister Lena Ma might be the best missionary in the world. At least that's the assessment of Anthony Middleton, president of the Canada Vancouver Mission. His opinion is a little surprising, considering that Sister Ma isn't one of his full-time missionaries and speaks Mandarin in English-speaking British Columbia. And yet each year at least two people she introduces to the gospel join the Church.

President Middleton recognizes that British Columbia has not been the most fertile ground in the world for converts for quite some time. But things are changing. Because of Sister Ma and other members like her, President Middleton says the number of investigators in that mission requesting baptism and confirmation has increased significantly. With missionary work receiving high-priority attention from their priesthood leaders, the Latter-day Saints of British Columbia are truly becoming

member missionaries. And the lessons they are learning can be used by missionary-minded members anywhere in the world.



Change

The Vancouver mission has struggled for years to increase the number of people who join the Church. Collin Van Horne, president of the Nanaimo British Columbia Stake, explains that in British Columbia “there is an unspoken understanding that religion is not a topic for discussion. In Canada, the phrase is ‘I’m all right, Jack.’” For a long time that culture left missionary work to the full-time missionaries, who spent most of their time tracting. Unfortunately, tracting is not a very productive way to find people interested in the gospel.

And so a couple of years ago, at the encouragement of General Authorities, the mission president and the stake presidents in British Columbia made some changes. Most of these changes involve helping members be better inviters.

Conduct Meetinghouse Tours

One of the changes the stake presidents made was adopting and adapting the successful way missionary work is done in nearby Tacoma, Washington.



Jean Zhao (left) on her baptism day, with her friend Lena Ma. Sister Zhao is one of many people Sister Ma has helped join the Church.

The missionaries there immediately invite interested contacts to the nearest meetinghouse for a tour. In explaining the Church's facilities and programs, the missionaries also teach about the Restoration. The tour finishes in the chapel or near a painting of the First Vision, where the missionaries bear testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and invite the guests to join them in prayer.

In British Columbia, meetinghouse tours are now part of a comprehensive missionary effort that encourages members—not just full-time missionaries—to invite their

the meetinghouse at the invitation of her 18-year-old friend. “While she was on the tour she became so excited she wanted to take the lessons right away. Her friend gave her a Book of Mormon, and another friend invited her to Young Women camp. She felt so loved and so involved that she began referring to the ward as ‘her ward’ even before she was baptized.”

Of course, not everyone who comes to an LDS meetinghouse immediately feels the Spirit. But many come away wanting to know more about the Church.

acquaintances on a tour. Vancouver mission records show that if seven people are invited to a meetinghouse tour, ideally with a member at their side, one will be baptized and confirmed.

“What we are trying to achieve through the course of the tour,” President Middleton says, “is to have a nonmember think, ‘You know, I’d feel very comfortable being a member of this church. It’s got something for me.’”

Many new members in British Columbia remember their first visit to a Latter-day Saint meetinghouse and feeling the Spirit there. Malcolm Coffill of the Port Alberni Ward, Nanaimo British Columbia Stake, joined the Church in August 2005 after being introduced to the gospel by his neighbors, Tom and Marla Housholder. Brother Coffill says that what convinced him to join the Church was “the wonderful feeling I felt the first time I stepped into that beautiful building and the friendly welcome I got.”

Sister Jill Berrett, a full-time missionary in the Vancouver mission, tells of an investigator who toured



and strangers about the gospel. “When we meet someone,” Shaina says, “right away, we ask, ‘Do you go to church in the area? We go to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Have you heard of it?’”

“We do try to have some fun with it. The other day, Sonny told me to go say hi to a man because he looked like a former member of our branch. When I walked up to him, I discovered that Sonny

Like the Orrego family (above), successful member missionaries find what works best for them and then make that part of their daily lives. The Orregos use a family mission plan to keep their attention focused on inviting others to hear about the gospel.

Learn from Successful Member Missionaries

Sister Ma has been inviting people to the Lord’s house for 10 years. More than 20 of those who have come have accepted the gospel. “I’ve never seen Sister Ma at a Church function without a nonmember in tow,” President Middleton says. And she always lets people know what to expect before their first visit.

Case in point: Ruby. Lena Ma met Ruby at the library and struck up a conversation. “I asked Ruby what she usually does on Sunday,” Sister Ma says. “I asked about her son, if there was anything in her church for him. I then explained about our Primary organization and invited her to come and see for herself. She came and then attended some more. She started the missionary lessons yesterday.”

Sonny and Shaina Sala, who recently moved from the Salt Spring Island Branch in British Columbia to the Cardston Eighth Ward in Alberta, have adopted much the same approach as Sister Ma. Sonny and Shaina have talked to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of acquaintances

was teasing me. The man was a stranger. There was this awkward moment, and then I just said, ‘You look like a friend I once knew. He was a member of my church. Have you ever heard of the Mormon Church?’ It turns out he used to be a member. We got into a discussion about faith, and I invited him to church. And then he said, ‘You know, I just got out of the hospital, and here you are, this angel, inviting me back to church.’ If I hadn’t opened my mouth, I wouldn’t have known he’d been in the hospital and needed to reconnect with the Church.”



“When you turn yourself over to the Lord,” Sonny says, “He’ll put people in your path.” He tells of backing up his motor home one day and ending up in a ditch. He called for a tow truck, and the Spirit prompted him to speak to the driver about the gospel. “I told

him, ‘The Lord put me in this ditch so I could meet you.’ He laughed, and we talked. It turns out his grandmother was a Mormon at one time. He wanted a copy of the Book of Mormon. We try to keep copies nearby, and I was happy to give him one.”

Develop Ward and Family Mission Plans

Sister Ma and the Salas have made missionary work a natural part of meeting people each day. Some of us, however, find the idea of talking to others about the gospel intimidating. We need a little help to get started. That's when a ward or branch mission plan comes in handy.

At a stake presidents' coordinating council soon after President Middleton became mission president, the stake presidents in British Columbia discussed their stake



Marla and Tom Housholder (above) invite the Spirit into their lodge. One who felt the Spirit's influence there, Malcolm Coffill (right), joined the Church.



mission plans and developed some guidelines for ward and branch plans, as *Preach My Gospel* recommends. The assumption is that those who author their own mission plan will be motivated to make the plan work. The stake presidents decided on four principles each ward and branch in their stakes should use to build its plan:

1. The plan should involve every member, not just the ward or branch mission leader.
2. It should have measurable goals.
3. It should invite families to create their own mission plans.
4. It should be simple.

Most wards and branches in British Columbia have now developed their own mission plans. The plans are so simple they can be placed on a small card and attached to a refrigerator. Some wards, like the Victoria Second Ward, have taken the next step. Bishop Frank Hitchmough and the ward mission leader, Michael Mulholland, have met with the families in the ward and helped them develop their own family mission plans. The plans consist of goals and approaches that each family decides work best for them.

Take Charge

Brother Mulholland makes it clear that the key to successful missionary work is not just a workable plan. "It's not so much the plan as who is taking charge," he says. "Having a stake presidency like President Keyes and his counselors committed to missionary work is what makes plans work. They give direction to the bishops, and when the bishops make missionary work a high priority, the work gets done."

President Randy Keyes of the Victoria British Columbia Stake tells how the priesthood leaders in British Columbia were asked by their Area Seventies to consider the priority they placed on missionary work. For many wards and branches, it was somewhat down the list. The priesthood leaders in British Columbia now rank it second only to taking care of the youth.

In wards where member missionary work is successful, bishops emphasize it in priesthood executive committee (PEC), ward council, and priesthood and Relief Society meetings. They delegate assignments and with the ward leadership track the progress of investigators and less-active members.

One of the more successful aspects of many ward mission plans is a member missionary class to which the bishop calls six or eight members at a time. A ward or full-time



missionary teaches the class. The text is *Preach My Gospel*, and topics include the doctrine behind missionary work, self-motivation, and practical approaches. Class members enjoy sharing personal missionary experiences and role-playing.

Ultimately, missionary work rests on the shoulders of the individual member. Every member needs to decide how he or she can best share the gospel—then do it.

Benjamin and Robin Orrego found what works for their family and then made it part of their family missionary effort even before they were asked to create a plan. They invite people to their home for “cottage meetings” at which they have inspiring, though not necessarily LDS, discussions. Games and food are part of the evening. The Orregos also hand out Church movies and literature.

They recognize, however, that being part of an organized, unified missionary effort is more effective than individual effort alone, and so they have made inviting three people to a meetinghouse tour each year part of their family plan. That goal, or a variation of it, is part of ward and family plans throughout British Columbia. The idea began with the president of the Abbotsford British Columbia Stake, Paul Christensen, and spread quickly.

Be Creative, Naturally

President Christensen has asked his stake members to consider some other ideas as well. Each month, the stake presidency suggests a different group of people members could consider for invitations, such as professionals, co-workers, or neighbors. He also wants the full-time missionaries to attend not only PEC and ward council but also auxiliary meetings. He attends missionary district meetings and zone

conferences, where he emphasizes that the missionaries’ role is to teach and the role of the members is to invite. Members support the missionaries and testify when the opportunity arises; occasionally, they may even be able to share gospel principles. But mostly, they invite others to “come and see” (John 1:39, 46).

One of his most creative ideas is to involve members of other faiths in teaching Church members skills they don’t have. “We recently had a single adult conference with a lot of seminars. The typical attitude is: Who do we know in the area who is a plumber? Who is a mechanic? I said, ‘Let’s not have any members teaching the seminars. Go get a plumber in the community. Go find a handyman. Have them come. Give them a chapel tour so they understand who we are.’ We need to be outward looking.”

The Victoria stake has taken that outward look to heart for a number of years. In 1978 Sandra Gill started a community genealogy society that first met in her basement. She still attends the society’s meetings and teaches classes, but most of her time is spent now at the family history center in the stake meetinghouse. With her are 60 other staff members, most of whom are nonmembers. The center is open about 45 hours a week, and some 70 percent of its patrons are not members of the Church.

Like Sister Gill, Tom and Marla Housholder have found creative ways to use their interests and circumstances to share the gospel. Brother and Sister Housholder own a small bed-and-breakfast lodge in Port Alberni. They make sure that the Church magazines are within easy reach in their lobby and that each

DO YOU HAVE A STORY OR APPROACH TO SHARE?

Members in British Columbia, Canada, have developed a variety of ways to invite others to learn about the gospel. If you have a way that has proved successful for you, we’d like to know about it so we can share it with other readers of the *Ensign*. Please e-mail your idea to ensign@ldschurch.org or send it to:

Missionary Ideas, *Ensign*
50 E. North Temple St., Rm. 2420
Salt Lake City, UT 84150-3220, USA

guest room has a Bible and a Book of Mormon. In the three years they've operated the lodge, they've "lost" more than 30 copies of the Book of Mormon and are hoping to lose some more. They also host a music festival and a crèche display at Christmastime. One of the choirs is from the Port Alberni Ward, where Tom Housholder serves as bishop.

Be Where the Spirit Is

President Christensen of the Abbotsford stake is a big believer in the divine power that attends the physical presence of LDS temples. That's one of the reasons he is so excited about the temple announced in June 2006 for Vancouver. "I don't think we're getting a temple because we're particularly righteous," he says. "I think we're getting a temple because we need it to share the gospel. We need the light it brings."

A surprising number of people in British Columbia have joined the Church because of feelings they had on temple grounds. "I'll never forget the feeling I had when I walked through the gates of Temple Square in Salt Lake City," Julie Keyes of the Victoria stake says. "It felt like I was walking from darkness into light." She was impressed by the whole experience—the people she met, the testimony of Joseph Smith, the focus on Jesus Christ. "I thought, 'I've got to find out more about this.'" When she returned home to British Columbia, she called the local LDS meetinghouse and asked to meet with the missionaries.

Sister Keyes, who is now married to the president of the Victoria stake, was at the temple grounds because a member of the Church invited her to come, and she was surprised by the warmth she felt from the members



there. In fact, if one common theme characterizes almost every story converts share in British Columbia, it is this: light, joy, and genuine friendliness emanate from members of the Church. Being with members and feeling the Spirit are what motivate them to learn more.

That seems to be the pattern the members of the Church in British Columbia are finding most successful. They're learning that it's not they who convert people; it's the Lord. They just need to live the gospel, love people, and invite them to be anywhere—the meetinghouse, Church activities, members' homes, temple grounds—where the Spirit is. The most experienced member missionaries don't worry if people reject their invitations. These members just keep inviting. The missionaries keep teaching. And the Lord keeps blessing His children with testimonies borne of His Spirit. ■

When the bishops make missionary work a high priority, the work gets done," says Victoria Second Ward mission leader Michael Mulholland (above), with recent converts Erma McArthur (left) and Beth Landry.