

What are we doing this week?" may be a question leaders hear often—and perhaps even dread—as we try to help youth plan and carry out effective Mutual activities. And while we often know the answer to that inquiry, a harder question might be "What are we *accomplishing* by doing what we are doing this week?"

As leaders and youth plan and carry out activities, they can help create memories—and testimonies—that will be carried into eternity.



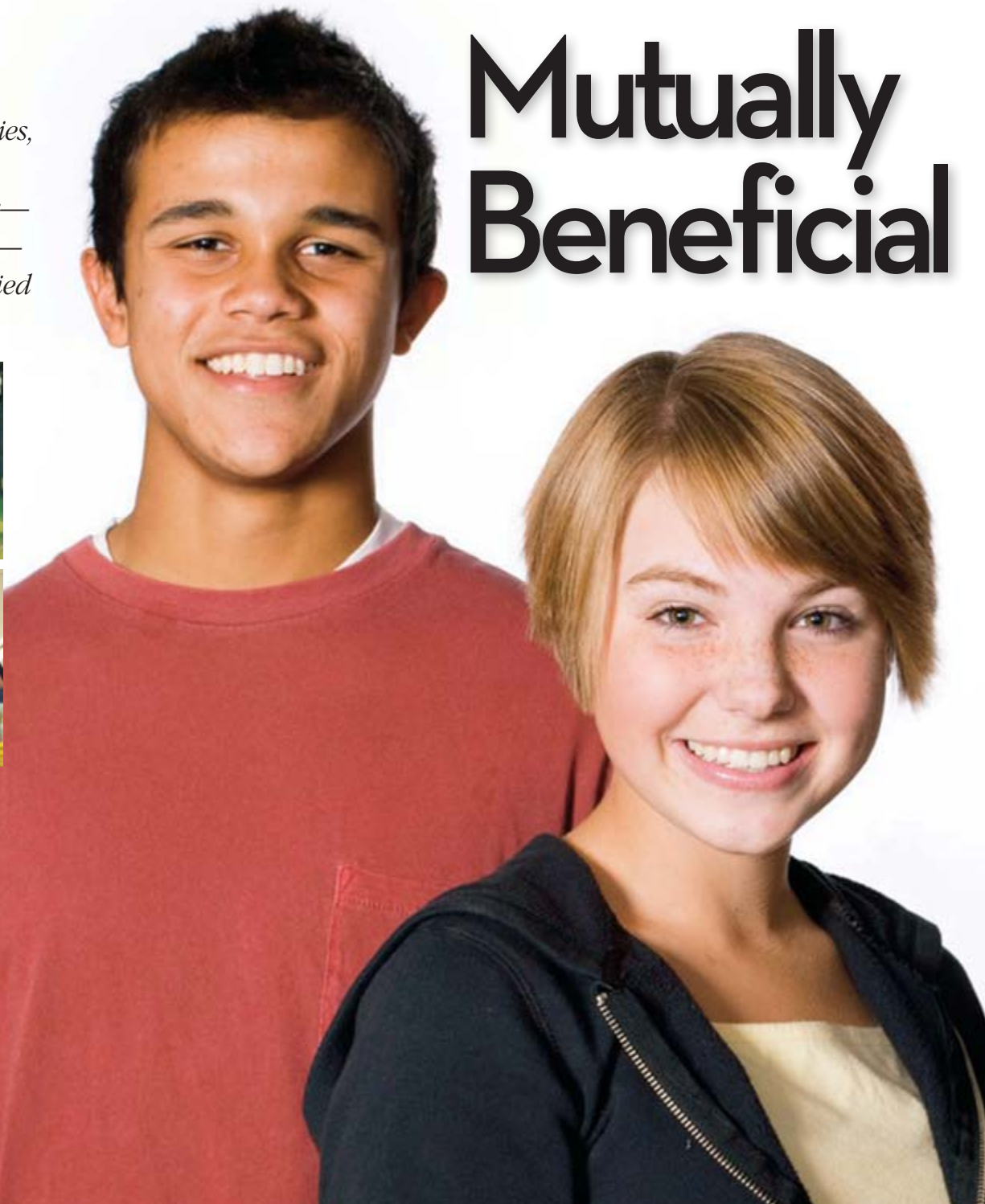
Recently, while speaking to leaders of youth, President Thomas S. Monson counseled that "the basic responsibility of helping youth to choose the right when the choice is placed before them is as cardinal a rule today as it has ever been."

"Give them memories to carry into eternity," he said, "and your name will be called blessed by the Lord." He

reiterated, as he often does, that the Lord inspires those whom He calls.¹

The *Ensign* invited some Church leaders to recall a pivotal Mutual or other youth activity and share what it accomplished for them. Perhaps today's leaders will find comfort in these experiences, realizing that their dedicated efforts are helping create important memories—and eternal testimonies.

Mutually Beneficial





Part of Something Extraordinary

By Elder Neil L. Andersen

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



In the late spring of 1967, our ward was asked to choose 16 youth to dance in the All-Church Dance Festival. For

our little town in rural Idaho, this was an adventure. The festival was to be held in the giant University of Utah stadium with thousands in attendance. I was not a dancer and was reluctant in our initial practices, but I soon came to enjoy being together with good young men and women preparing for the dance festival. The thought of going to the large city of Salt Lake and staying at a hotel with a swimming pool motivated us.

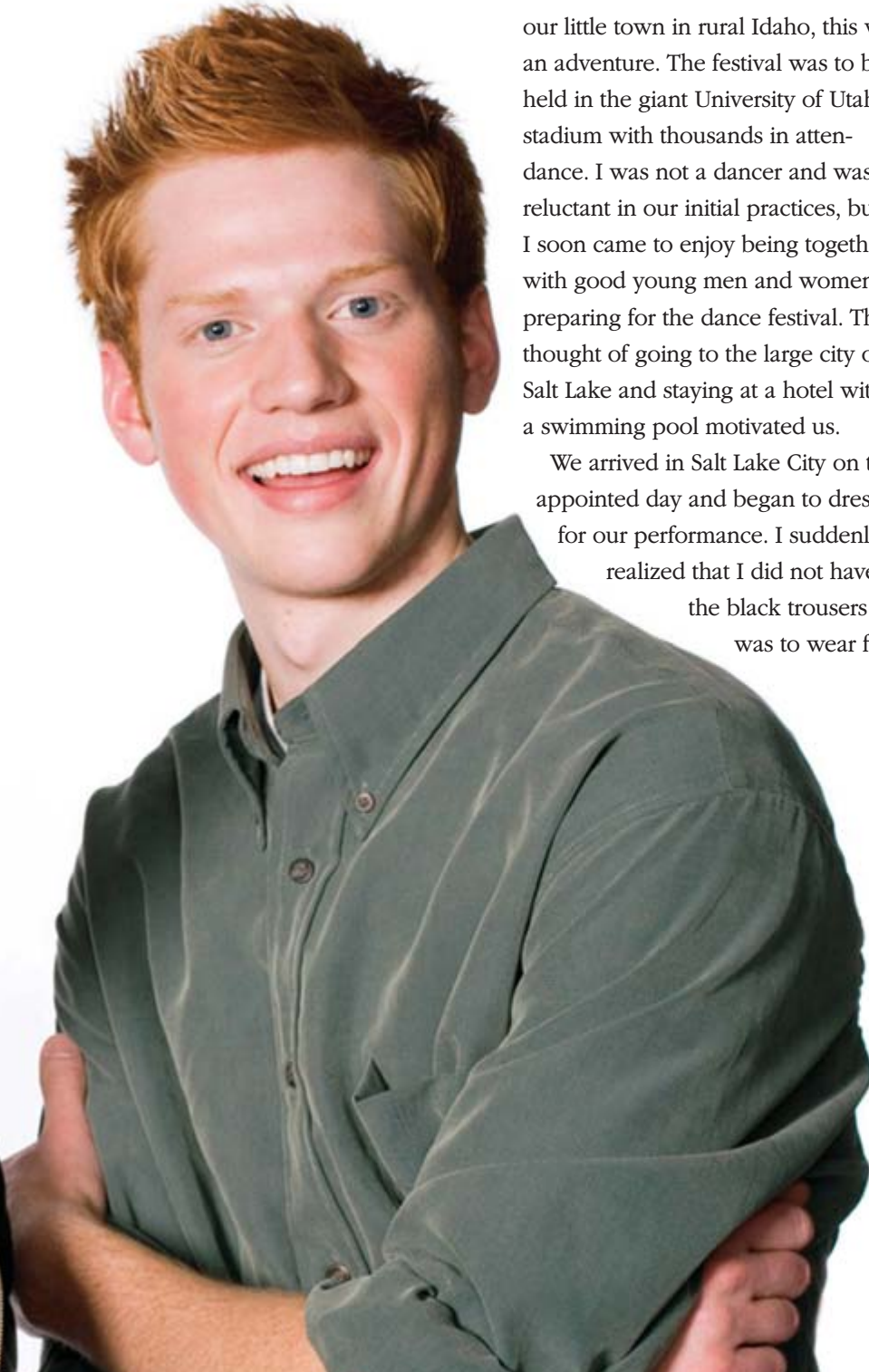
We arrived in Salt Lake City on the appointed day and began to dress for our performance. I suddenly realized that I did not have the black trousers I was to wear for

our ballroom dance. I had left them at home. We did not even consider going to the store to buy a pair of pants, because it would have been too expensive. I did not know what I would do.

The solution came as my Young Men leader, Brother Lowe, offered to let me wear his dark pants. When I put the pants on, I was happy that they were about the right length. However, I quickly realized that I had a problem: the pants were several inches too large in the waist. “What am I going to do?” I thought. I was grateful for the kindness of Brother Lowe but felt very embarrassed to wear the large pants. Brother Lowe and my friends assured me that no one would know because the pants would be mostly covered with my suit coat and I could use a belt to cinch them up tightly.

I still remember the feeling of arriving at the stadium and seeing hundreds of young men and young women from all over the country who shared my beliefs and convictions. It was a great moment for me to realize how important the Church was to so many.

When it was our turn, we moved onto the field. As the dance began, much to my horror, I could feel the big ballooning trousers slipping. There was no time to fix the situation; the music had begun. The dilemma added new steps to my ballroom experience. Not only was it necessary to remember all we had been taught, but I also had to invent some new movements to keep my trousers in place. At times these steps dismayed



my talented partner, but they saved me from a more troubling conclusion.

I have never forgotten my brief precarious moments of ballroom dancing. More important, I have never forgotten the feeling that we were all part of something extraordinary—not simply a dance festival—but the restored Church and gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Testimony Gained at Sunrise

By Elder Paul B. Pieper

Of the Seventy



I grew up as a member of the Church. I was taught the principles of the gospel by my parents and was baptized and confirmed by and received the priesthood from my worthy father. I felt the influence of the Spirit in my life, but I did not receive a witness of the reality of the Atonement until one Easter in my teen years.

A group of several hundred seminary students gathered for a testimony meeting before dawn. I suppose that I shared my testimony that morning, but I can't be sure. What I know is that during the meeting as the sun rose on a new Easter, the Spirit came into my heart and testified of the reality of Jesus Christ, His life, His teachings, His Atonement, and His Resurrection. I have felt the confirmation of that testimony many times during the more

than 30 years I have testified of Jesus Christ as a missionary, father, friend, and Church leader. But the anchor for me has been the witness I received from the Spirit that Easter morning.

The Shaping of Future Missionaries

By Elder Keith K. Hilbig

Of the Seventy



As a member of the Milwaukee Wisconsin Ward, I was directed by devoted leaders.

Our activities were a marvelous resource for developing social interaction skills, helping us overcome the awkwardness of teenage years. However, one Mutual experience especially shaped the course of my young life. It occurred in 1956, 54 years ago! Yet even today I remember it clearly.

We young men worked together during Mutual each Wednesday to build a detailed, four-foot-high (1.2 m) replica of the beautiful Salt Lake Temple. We also created a large poster detailing the purpose and story of the Book of Mormon.

Our ward's Boy Scout troop had obtained a prominent booth for the annual display of Scouting skills in our city. Hundreds of visitors walked by our booth and saw our display. Many stopped. They inquired of young Aaronic Priesthood boys in Scout uniforms as to the purpose

of the temple display. Many then inquired about the Book of Mormon. We young Aaronic Priesthood holders explained the best we could and then provided them a paperback copy of the Book of Mormon.

A dear fellow Scout and I (we were in the same teachers quorum) felt like 20-year-old missionaries! We both silently committed to be worthy and to serve as full-time missionaries. Eventually, we both did just that—thanks, in part, to Mutual and to devoted leaders of youth.



I truly believe

that activities, done on a large or small scale, are key to strengthening not only the youth of the Church but to strengthening families. In these settings, the gospel is taught in informal ways and observed as it is lived in the lives of those who have been called to lead.

Perhaps when we think of activities, we should think of the thirteenth article of faith with a little twist: If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we *provide* these things.

Elaine S. Dalton, Young Women general president.

By Small and Simple Means

By Elaine S. Dalton

Young Women General President



When I think about my youth experiences, I think of the accumulation of the many small and simple things that strengthened my testimony (see Alma 37:6–7). The ward of my youth was like a large family. When we had a ward dinner, everyone came. Whenever the Relief Society had a bazaar or the Primary had a parade, everyone came. Our ward was our social life.

Thinking back to my first ward road show, I distinctly remember the early-morning practices, the prayers, the talking to others as we waited to perform our parts, and the camaraderie we felt as we painted scenery, practiced, and learned together. These were the times when I watched how the gospel worked in the real lives of real people. I saw how my advisers handled problems, how leaders reacted under pressure, how spouses related to each other, and I made silent decisions about living the principles I was being taught on Sunday. I felt the Spirit as we prayed for miracles, such as remembering our parts or the health of one of the youth.

I don't remember my lines from that road show, nor do I remember all the other particulars. But I do

WHAT IS MUTUAL?

Young men and young women should have regularly scheduled activities called Mutual. The term *Mutual* suggests shared experiences in which there is mutual respect and support for one another. Mutual activities should provide youth with a variety of opportunities to serve others and to develop spiritually, socially, physically, and intellectually.

Mutual is held on a day or an evening other than Sunday or Monday. It is generally held once a week but may be held less frequently if priesthood leaders determine that travel, resources, or other circumstances prevent a weekly meeting.

The ward or branch Young Men and Young Women presidencies, under the direction of the bishopric or branch presidency, oversee Mutual.

For more information, go to LDS.org and click on "Serving in the Church."

remember how I felt as we performed and as I looked into the faces of my ward members and saw their approval and felt their love.

Accepting the Invitation

By David L. Beck

Young Men General President



One of the most memorable activities that I participated in as a youth was a large dance festival.

I am quite certain

I never would have volunteered for such an activity. However, with some coaxing, I accepted the invitation to participate, even though at first I wasn't thrilled about the idea.

We practiced a lot, and learning the dances was a slow process. I am grateful for dedicated instructors, for a patient dance partner, and for my mother, who sewed my costume and encouraged me to do my best.

The festival was held at a football

stadium. I had never participated in something so large. Each group entertained the crowd as we performed choreographed dances in colorful costumes. Then the football field literally filled with dancers as all of us performed a closing number together. It turned out to be an impressive show.

I enjoyed that dance festival a lot more than I thought I would. It allowed me to view the Church in a different way. I saw vast numbers of youth having a great time. I met new friends, I developed new skills, and I played a small part in a big production that entertained thousands.

Because I accepted the invitation to dance in that festival—and other invitations that have come to me in the Church—my life has been blessed, and I have had the chance to bless others. I feel so privileged to have had so many wonderful experiences as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ■

NOTE

1. See Sarah Jane Weaver, "Building on a Firm Foundation for Young Women," *Church News*, Nov. 28, 2009, 3.