

Elder Oaks Bolsters Members in Asia

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited Church members in India, Pakistan, and Thailand from August 17 through 26, 2007. Elder Oaks and his wife, Kristen, were accompanied by Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the Seventy, First Counselor in the Asia Area Presidency, and his wife, Diane.

Throughout the trip, Elder Oaks and Elder Hallstrom emphasized gospel fundamentals such as a testimony of the Savior, strengthening families, priesthood keys and temple ordinances, and the need to focus on training the youth as future leaders.

India

Nearly 7,000 members live in India, where the predominant religions are Hinduism and Islam. Most members live in two districts in the south, including Bangalore, where the India Bangalore Mission is headquartered.

“When I last visited India there were only a few hundred members in the entire country,” Elder Oaks said at a district conference in New Delhi, the capital of India. “Now it thrills me to see how our membership has increased in numbers and maturity.”

Though it can be challenging, members of the Church in India, like many other Christians, are permitted to practice their religion. “They treasure their temple sealings,” Elder Oaks said, noting that 93 percent of the



COURTESY OF ELDER DALLIN H. OAKS

Elder Dallin H. Oaks (back right), with his wife, Kristen; Elder Donald L. Hallstrom and his wife, Diane (back center); and President Karl L. Dodge and his wife, Gunda Le (back left), stand with members of the Chiang Mai district.

endowed members in India hold current temple recommends.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, Elder and Sister Oaks and Elder and

Sister Hallstrom visited the homes of various members and conducted a weekday fireside.

Only native Pakistani missionaries serve in this Islamic republic of about 170 million

people, a number that includes about 3 million Christians. “It is not easy to be a Christian in Pakistan,” said Elder Oaks. Many Christians live together in colonies.

Thailand

Elder and Sister Oaks and Elder and Sister Hallstrom then flew to Thailand for a conference in the Chiang Mai district in northern Thailand, where there are about 875 members. Most of the more than 15,000 members in Thailand reside in the south.

Thailand is an economically thriving country. Approximately 95 percent of its citizens are Buddhists, though religious freedoms are granted to others. ■

Adapted from Church News, September 22, 2007.

Elder Bednar Visits Ghana

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spent June 11 through 17, 2007, in Ghana visiting with members and conducting affairs of the Church. Elder Bednar’s wife, Susan, accompanied him on the trip.

Elder Bednar addressed missionaries of the Ghana Accra Mission at the missionary training center in Tema. He also spoke to local employees at the Africa West Area office and volunteers who serve at the Accra Ghana Temple complex.

During his visit, he spent an evening conducting a

First Presidency Creates Mission in India

The India New Delhi Mission, announced recently by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, becomes the second mission in India, and brings the total number of missions in the world to 348.

The new mission, which opened on November 1, 2007, was created from the division of the India Bangalore Mission and the Singapore Mission.

The New Delhi Mission includes the northern portion of India and Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

Gary R. Ricks, serving with his wife, Florence, in New Delhi as a senior missionary, has been called as the new mission president.

The rest of the country will be retained in the India Bangalore Mission, with the addition of Sri Lanka. The Singapore Mission will include Singapore, East Malaysia, and West Malaysia.

The division will help reduce travel distances and increase the time the mission presidents will have to work with the missionaries. ■

90-minute question-and-answer session with some 800 young single adult members at the Accra Ghana Christiansborg Stake Center in the temple complex.

The primary purpose of Elder Bednar's visit to Accra was to create the Accra Ghana McCarthy Hill Stake. Elder Bednar's companion for this assignment was Elder

Adesina J. Olukanni, Africa West Area Seventy from Lagos, Nigeria. Other changes included the reorganization of the Accra Ghana Adenta and Christiansborg Stakes.

As part of this tour, Elder Bednar traveled to Togo and Benin on June 12 to dedicate the two countries for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ■



Elder M. Russell Ballard addresses common questions in video segments posted online.

Elder Ballard Answers Frequently Asked Questions

A series of video clips in which Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles addresses some of the questions most frequently asked by the news media has been posted on LDS.org.

Elder Ballard covers topics such as whether Latter-day Saints are Christian and whether or not the Church supports political candidates.

The video clips, available in English, were produced to help better define the Church in the public mind—especially among journalists—because of increasing visibility in the United States. A series

of national opinion polls has shown that a large segment of the population knows little or nothing about the Church.

Responding to one of the most common questions—Are Mormons Christians?—Elder Ballard said: “[Jesus Christ] is the center of all that we do, all that we hope to be. All of our dreams and future aspirations are centered in our belief in Jesus Christ and our willingness to know what His teachings are and to strive to keep His commandments.”

The unscripted interviews were conducted by members of the Church's Public Affairs staff and announced during

an online news conference with the religion writers of several newspapers around the country.

Church spokespersons said that the posting of an interview with a senior Church leader was one of several steps being taken to more clearly define Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices. It is expected that other interviews will follow on a range of topics and will include other Apostles. Elder Ballard is presently chairman of the Church's Public Affairs Committee.

Elder Ballard responded to the following questions: Are you Christian? What is the role

of Jesus Christ in your faith? Do you worship Jesus Christ in your Sunday services? Why do some people say you are a cult? In what ways are you similar to other Christians? In what ways do you differ from other Christians? Was Joseph Smith a prophet? Are prophets necessary today? Is there scientific proof authenticating the Book of Mormon? Does the Church support political candidates?

To access the video clips, visit LDS.org, click on **Newsroom** in the lower right corner, and then enter the term “Elder Ballard interview” in the **Search** box. ■

Christmas Lights, Efforts Help Testify of Christ

By Molly Farmer, Church Magazines

Hundreds of thousands of lights shine from Temple Square at the close of each year. Many glow from branches high in chestnut trees while others flicker and float in reflecting pools, but they all are meant to invite visitors to share in the message of the birth of the Savior, the Light of the World.

Volunteers and employees responsible for the Christmas decor and musical programs at Church headquarters log many hours making the grounds an inviting place for the Spirit to reside.

Preparations begin months in advance, with plans for the elaborate design drawn up early each year. Concerts and performances are booked the previous year, and the first lights are hung

as early as August in order to have the gardens ready for the end of November.

With millions of people visiting Temple Square each year—many during the Christmas season—groundskeepers take special care to create an environment that helps people feel the Spirit and learn more about the gospel. December is an especially appropriate time to “help people understand that we're here for the purpose of celebrating the birth of Christ,” said Eldon Cannon, group manager for Church facilities.

Getting that message out requires planning and labor. Each workday from mid-August until the day after Thanksgiving—when the lights are turned on—is



Months of effort help make Temple Square at Christmastime a place where visitors can reflect on the Light of the World, the Savior Jesus Christ.

thoughtfully planned, and gardeners and light-hanging crews work steadily to accomplish their goal.

“Our workers are just wonderful,” said Kathy Mills, Christmas coordinator for the facilities department. Employees are hoisted in lifts as high as 50 feet to wrap individual tree limbs in colorful lights. The result of all this work, which prompts visitors who visit the grounds to gaze in awe, makes the effort worthwhile, Brother Cannon said. Sister Mills added that dedicated volunteers donate about 2,000 hours of their time to the endeavor.

One of the most prominent trees on Temple Square, the 60-foot cedar of Lebanon, requires more than 1,500 strands of red lights before it’s fully lit. Sister Mills said the enormous, glowing tree is

an attraction in itself.

“[People] may be drawn by seeing this wonderfully lit square . . . but ultimately, behind it all, is a message about Christ,” said Richard Lenz, event coordinator at Temple Square.

Brother Lenz is responsible for overseeing some 400 musical and theatrical programs that occur between November 23 and December 24. An estimated 350 visiting choirs—the majority of which are high school choirs from Utah and Idaho—will perform this year in a variety of locations around Temple Square. The beautiful sights and sounds all combine to create a powerful impression, Brother Lenz said.

When the lights are turned off on New Year’s Eve, the clean-up work begins, and employees work until

mid-March to take down all the decorations.

“It’s a real commitment,” Brother Cannon said, but the effort is validated by the opportunities it affords. The yearly event allows members to “teach people about what we believe.”

Coupling visual splendor with personal testimonies makes the experience people have on Temple Square even more powerful. Many are drawn in to see the stunning *Christus* statue in the North Visitors’ Center, while others hear from missionaries who bear testimony of Christ.

Though the tradition of lighting Temple Square dates back some 40 years, organizers still add new elements to inspire people. Luminarias, a type of Christmas lantern common in Central and South America, line walkways

and are as well-loved by guests as the traditional lights, Sister Mills said. The paper bags that surround the lights proclaim messages such as “Joy,” “Merry Christmas,” and “Hope,” Brother Cannon said, and represent more than 100 languages. Organizers have also incorporated multicultural nativity scenes representing Asian, Polynesian, African, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures.

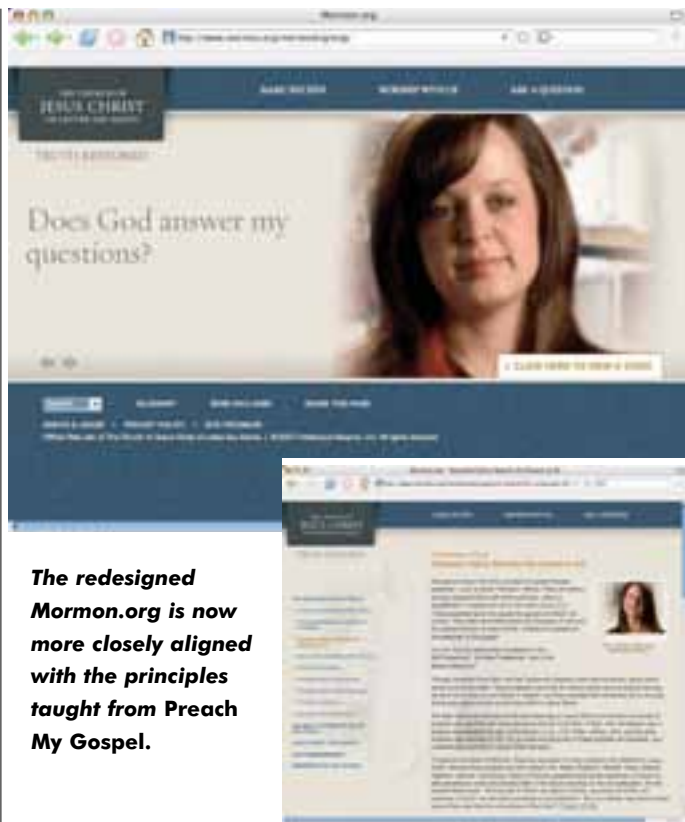
“I think the message is universal,” Brother Cannon said. “It’s the joy and hope brought by Christ’s coming to the world. That message crosses all barriers.”

Though it’s a lot of work, Sister Mills, Brother Lenz, and Brother Cannon agree that preparing Temple Square for the Christmas season is a special endeavor that puts visitors in the Christmas spirit. The music, lights, gardens, and nativity scenes all come together to help people feel the love of the Lord.

“It’s something bigger than just the pieces,” Brother Cannon said. “The purpose of all of this is to teach people about Christ.” ■

Mormon.org Redesigned

People interested in learning more about the Church can now access the doctrines of the restored gospel on the recently redesigned Web site, Mormon.org. The site is now easier to navigate and more closely aligned with the



The redesigned Mormon.org is now more closely aligned with the principles taught from Preach My Gospel.

material found in the missionary lessons from *Preach My Gospel*.

Those viewing the site's main page are given "answers to life's great questions" through a number of short videos featuring converts to the Church, said Scott Swofford, director of media for the Missionary Department. The men and women in the videos are all real members of the Church who share personal responses to questions such as Does God have more for me? and Does God really know me?

The site was redesigned so the core doctrines of the Church are easily accessible, though other doctrine can also be found using the glossary feature. There are links to meetinghouse locators for those interested in attending

a meeting as well as Book of Mormon and missionary request forms.

Also new to the site is the Ask a Question feature, which allows people interested in learning more about the Church to chat in real time with missionaries and trainers at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah. The goal "is to arm them with information and then get them to start a dialogue with full-time missionaries," Brother Swofford said.

The live-chat option has already proven to be a successful tool. The feature offers many opportunities for missionaries to share their testimonies, and questions can also be answered through e-mail correspondence.

Brother Swofford says the site will serve as a great

missionary tool for members of the Church who acquaint themselves with it. He said referring people to the Web site when they have questions about the Church is "a very painless way to do missionary work. It's a

chance for members to share their beliefs with other people."

The site is currently available in English and will eventually be available in other languages as well. ■

Sister Inis Hunter Dies

Inis Bernice Egan Hunter, wife of President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95), died at the age of 93 on Sunday, October 14, 2007, from age-related causes. President Hunter served as 14th President of the Church from 1994 to 1995.

Sister Hunter traveled with President Hunter as he performed his Church duties, which included the dedication of two temples.

She was born in Thatcher,

Utah, to Horace Walter Egan and Anna Bernhardina Jacobsson Tengberg.

Sister Hunter, President Hunter's second wife, was the mother of three children from a previous marriage: Barbara, Robert, and Elayne. Her funeral services were held on October 22, 2007, in Salt Lake City.

President Hunter's first wife, Clara May (Claire), died on October 9, 1983. ■

Canadian Saints Committed to Humanitarian Aid

Some 60 members in the Petawawa Branch, Ottawa Ontario Stake, located 100 miles [160 km] northwest of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, have not only become committed to service themselves, but they have also excited the community about serving.

"Our little branch became infected with the humanitarian aid bug," explained branch member Mary Tromp, and they've infected others.

It began with a notice in the *Ensign* about the need for quilts in Chile. A sister in the branch presented the idea of making quilts for the needy to the Relief Society. They

soon took on the challenge of gathering fabric and batting and then working together at the meetinghouse and sisters' homes.

When it came time to tie the quilts, the Primary children joined in. As the project expanded, the children donated money and goods. "The wonderful part of all this was that the more we gave, the more we wanted to do," said Sister Tromp.

Word spread to nonmember friends who donated fabric, quilts, and clothing. As the public heard of the projects, help came from unexpected sources. A group of young mothers in a continuing

education program offered their services and sewed quilt tops. A fabric shop offered a discount on batting for the quilts. A Pembroke grocery store donated 200 dresses to the branch.

In February 2004, branch members loaded up their cars to deliver the quilts to the bishop's storehouse in Canandaigua, New York.

But the "bug" has only continued to spread. In June 2007, a member couple and their friends held a garage sale. All proceeds were given to the branch's humanitarian aid fund to purchase more items for hygiene kits and sewing supplies for quilts.

In June 2007 sisters made the seven-hour drive to the Canandaigua storehouse with the branch's latest offerings. Because the donations had outgrown the

capacity of their cars, the sisters drove a truck packed with 50 quilts, many hygiene kits, and boxes of children's clothing. The sisters remained in the area to serve in the storehouse's canning facility for half a day.

Sister Tromp explained: "We have been very blessed as we have been given the chance to serve our brothers and sisters. The joy that we feel will keep our fingers sewing and tying for the foreseeable future. Like the little train that could, our little branch could and did. What a blessing it is to serve our Savior. Every day He gives to us is a gift. What gifts can we give Him each day in return?"

For more information on how to assist the Church's humanitarian aid efforts, go to www.lds.org/humanitarian services. ■



the *Ensign*. President James E. Faust's article, "Welcoming Every Single One," was so important. A friend told me in a discussion recently that the Church is really geared towards married couples and families. I shared the August issue with this article, and it was a comfort to my friend. Julie McDonald, Utah

Church Magazines Available Electronically

We would like to express our gratitude for the electronic versions of Church magazines. I found an article today that I used to teach a lesson, and my wife uses articles from the *Friend* as a source of inspiration as she teaches our grandchildren. We reside in the most remote capital city on earth, so the availability of the prophetic counsel as well as articles on gospel subjects are a wonderful lift in our lives.

Phil and Trish Baker, Australia

One Million Names

Several readers have expressed interest in the FamilySearch indexing project. Derek Dobson, product manager of FamilySearch Indexing, reported, "Since the article was published ["FamilySearch Indexing," August, 34], we have had almost 20,000 new

users register to participate as volunteers, and we are now indexing more than one million names per day. I anticipate that we will soon have over 100,000

users in the system and will be producing even more names per day that will be searchable online at FamilySearch.org. Many thanks!"

Updates

The painting on the inside front cover of the July 2007 *Ensign*, *Celebration on July 4, 1847, Los Angeles, California*, is listed as a work by Charles Brent Hancock. The painting appears to be a work by pioneer Latter-day Saint artist C. C. A. Christensen. Definitive information is not available, but Charles Hancock is known to have used works by C. C. A. Christensen in a series of historical presentations. The painting was included in the book *C. C. A. Christensen: 1831-1912: Mormon Immigrant Artist* (page 89), published in 1984.

In the article "Are you Prepared?" (*Ensign*, August 2007, 30) President George Albert Smith (1870-1951) is credited with a quote in the section "Latter-day Prophets Speak on Preparedness" on page 33. The quote was actually from Elder George A. Smith (1817-1875), President Smith's grandfather, who served as a counselor to President Brigham Young. ■

Comments

Everyday Laughter

I want to say thank you for Gary K. Palmer's article, "The Power of Laughter," in the September 2007 *Ensign*. My wife and I read



the article and found it very helpful in reminding us to laugh and play in our daily interactions with each other and with our son.

Scott Johnson, New York

Trusting His Will

I just read Wendy Johnston's article, "Not My Will," in the August 2007 *Ensign*. I was very touched by her faith and courage.

I face challenges with my own children, and although my challenges are different from Wendy's, I was reminded that our trials give us the opportunity to seek and accept the will

of the Father for our families and ourselves.

Suzanne White, Australia

Welcoming All

I must write and thank you for the August 2007 issue of