

Indexing IS VITAL

Indexing makes more records accessible online so members can find and take family names to the temple.

By Jennifer Grace Jones

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A small note on the keyboard read, “This computer is reserved for Samuel at 5:00 a.m.” In response to his stake president’s challenge for the stake to index one million names, 14-year-old Samuel B. of Utah started getting up at 5:00 a.m. so that he could index before school. With one computer in the home and six siblings with homework to do, Samuel had to sacrifice some sleep in order to get time on the computer.

But Samuel’s enthusiasm spread to the rest of his family. Soon his brother Nathan sacrificed basketball time and his sister Ivylyn sacrificed reading time in order to index. “I’ve never been challenged as much by my children,” Samuel’s father says. “Until they got involved, I thought indexing was hard. They taught me that it could be easy and fun.” The following New Year’s Eve, the children were rushing to finish their yearly indexing goals before midnight.

Thousands of miles away, the Lanuza family in Guatemala caught the same enthusiasm. This family of nine—five children, Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa—share one computer. With the children using the computer for homework, Mom finishing her studies at the university, and Dad working, the computer is always in high demand, and each family member takes turns indexing. Together, the family indexed more than 37,000 records in 2011.

These children and their families have risen to the challenge Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles extended to the youth of the Church in October 2011:

“Many of you may think family history work is to be performed primarily by older people. But I know of no age limit described in the scriptures or guidelines announced by Church leaders restricting this important service to mature adults. . . .

“I invite the young people of the Church to learn about and experience the Spirit of Elijah.”¹

Quick and Easy Family History

Indexing is an easy way for everyone to get started with family history and experience the Spirit of Elijah. Governments and churches have kept records of people and families for centuries, but these records have been tough to access and time-consuming to sort through. Previously, people who were geographically separated from their ancestral lands had to travel to those places and wade through the records, having no assurance that they would find a single family name.

The introduction of FamilySearch indexing in 2006 accelerated family history research. Names once hidden in handwritten paper records and stored in distant repositories have been transcribed (indexed) and are now instantly searchable by computer. To accomplish this, volunteer indexers download to their home computers “batches” of records containing about 10 to 50 names. They type the names, dates, and other information into the Family Search database, thus enabling the creation of searchable electronic indexes.

Before the launch of FamilySearch indexing, it could take years to create a searchable index for even one set of records using previous name-extraction techniques. Michael Judson, an indexing manager for FamilySearch, says it took 11 years to index the Freedman Bank Records (United States records of freed slaves who set up bank accounts). Now he estimates it would take only months.

Volunteers worldwide have indexed more than one billion records since 2006, but there's a lot more work to do. Billions of additional records are waiting in the Granite Mountain Records Vault in Salt Lake City, Utah. And beyond that are the records found in other archives across the globe, which the Family History Department is photographing at the rate of about 35 million digital images per month.

Specific Situations, Specific Blessings

The First Presidency has stated, "Members are encouraged to participate in FamilySearch indexing which is vital to family history and temple work."² Members from around the world are responding to this counsel and receiving remarkable blessings.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LESLIE NILSSON

The Saints in Ukraine are working hard to create electronic indexes that will expedite family history research in Eastern Europe. The Rudenko family in Kyiv is setting a powerful example. They sacrifice to pay for the Internet so they and their children can index names. Sister Rudenko leaves the family laptop on the kitchen table so she can index when she has spare moments during the day. She types names with one hand while holding a baby with the other. Their 16-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter have also become regular indexers, and the family sometimes visits the government archives to research family names. The Rudenko family regularly submits names to the temple and performs the ordinances for those names, sometimes going to the temple multiple times a week.

Sister Rudenko speaks of the blessings she has received through family history work: “I believe that indexing and family history work protect us. I am promised in my patriarchal blessing that doing this work will protect me and my children. Their minds will be clean, and they will be able to

withstand the bad influences of this world. . . . [My children] have the power of God from this work.”

Many members are discovering that indexing provides a meaningful service opportunity, regardless of skill or situation. Malinda Perry of Utah, USA, was in a car accident when she was 24 years old that left her paralyzed from the neck down. As she adjusted to this new lifestyle, Sister Perry prayed about ways she could serve. She received her answer when Rayleen Anderson from the stake Relief Society presidency visited her and taught her how to index. Sister Perry now spends time at the computer every day with a stick taped to her hand, moving it just enough to type. She indexes a batch of names daily.

“Instead of focusing on myself, like I used to, my focus has changed to serving others,” Sister Perry says. “I love the Lord, and I love extending His blessings to others through indexing.”

While listening to a presentation on family history, stake president David Pickup in Chorley, England, felt an impression that indexing could help the members of his stake increase their desire to worship in the temple. But



he wondered, how would something that looked like common data entry lead people to the temple?

He decided to try indexing and found that it brought an added measure of the Spirit of Elijah into his life. For him, indexing has become a “refining” work. “You cannot index without thinking about not only the names being indexed but also your own family names,” he says.

President Pickup challenged the members of his stake to use indexing as a way to participate in family history work. Within a short time, he and other stake leaders noticed a significant increase in temple recommend worthiness and sacrament meeting attendance. They noticed that the members who participated in indexing were developing a desire to take their own family names to the temple.

Seventeen-year-old Mackenzie H. took President Pickup’s challenge to heart and began indexing, and she helped her siblings, parents, and grandparents become involved as well. In less than two years, Mackenzie indexed more than 44,000 names. More importantly, Mackenzie and her family felt prompted to seek out their own family names, take them to the temple, and participate in the saving ordinances.

Indexing helped the members of the Chorley stake by bringing an added measure of the Spirit into their lives and by giving them the tools they needed to take their family names to the temple. “You don’t need to be temple worthy to index,” President Pickup says, “but when you index, it will refine you, and you will want to be temple worthy, and you will want to go to the temple, and you will want to do work for your ancestors. . . . I know this because it happened to me.”

Indexing Helps Everyone

The Lord has promised, “Behold, I will hasten my work in its time” (D&C 88:73). Indexing is one way the Lord is fulfilling that promise. It’s possible for people to find their own ancestors and leave others to find theirs, but indexing facilitates and accelerates family history research for everyone. “The Lord has given us the technology for massive improvements in finding names,” Brother Judson says. “You’re not just working on your own family history now; indexing is a collective effort to help all Heavenly Father’s children.” ■

MORE THAN JUST DATA ENTRY

At first indexing may appear similar to mundane data entry, but experienced indexers often testify that indexing is a spiritual pursuit that blesses lives on both sides of the veil.

Below are some suggestions that will help indexing become a spiritually fulfilling experience:

1. Begin with prayer. You may want to pray specifically to experience the Spirit of Elijah so that your heart will turn toward your ancestors.
2. Eliminate distractions, including television or music that could detract from the Spirit.
3. Index with family or friends. Not only will this give you help to read difficult handwriting, but it may also open the door for you to discuss your own family history.
4. Remember that every name you index represents another individual who can be found by living descendants and receive ordinances by proxy in the temple.
5. Remember that the Lord will help you. Through the Savior you can overcome any challenge you may experience with indexing (see 2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

Indexing is available in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. For more information, visit familysearch.org/indexing.

NOTES

1. David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 26.
2. First Presidency letter, Feb. 29, 2012.