



We Are Witnesses: The Twelve Apostles Today

Modern Apostles share their thoughts on their sacred calling.

By Sarah Jane Weaver and Jason Swensen

Church News

In the 189 years since the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 102 men have been called to serve as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Although the Lord has directed many changes in the Church since then, the fundamental duties of an Apostle remain the same.

From his office near Temple Square, President M. Russell Ballard, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke of the spiritual mandate given to the Apostles to testify of the Savior around the globe, of the special connection they share with missionaries, and of some common misconceptions about being “an apostle, seer, and revelator.” When asked if there were other members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles he would recommend to talk about their sacred calling as part of this article, President Ballard was quick to answer, “Yes. All of them.”



Being in Tune

Vast challenges face today's Apostles. They minister to worldwide congregations that are being tested by political unrest, breakdown of the family, relentless social media pressures, and economic uncertainties. It is important for the Apostles to understand the challenges and circumstances that members face.

As Church leaders, the Apostles must get to know the people and their circumstances to be able to serve them better. "We need to learn the things affecting the lives of people," said Elder Ulisses Soares. "The Apostles need to be in a constant process of learning, inquiring, and receiving inspiration and revelation."

As important as it is to be in tune with what members face, it is even more important for the Apostles to listen closely to God's guiding voice and to be in tune with the Lord's will, said President Ballard. "This is the Lord's Church, and our major challenge is to be sure we are in tune with how He would want us to carry out His kingdom here on earth," President Ballard said.

Special Witnesses

As each Apostle speaks about his calling, it quickly becomes apparent that administrative matters are not their primary concern. Their principal responsibility is exactly the same as it has always been—they are to be "special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:23).

The Savior's last direction to His Apostles (see Matthew 28:19–20) was to go forth "to teach, to testify, to baptize, and to build and strengthen His Church," said President Ballard.

Today the Apostles' commission hasn't changed. "First and foremost, all the time, we are witnesses of the living reality of the Lord Jesus Christ," said Elder David A. Bednar. "We are not administrators; we are ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Apostles are commissioned "to be traveling witnesses" who go to "all the world," said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland. "We want even the most distant unit of this Church, geographically speaking, to feel that there is a very close link between them and the prophet of the Lord," he said. "It is often said,



‘The Church makes a very small world of it.’ In the case of Apostolic contact, we hope that this is always so.”

Reaching Every Stake

Elder Quentin L. Cook explained that over a four-year period, every single stake and ward, district and branch, in the Church has a member of the Twelve coming and meeting with its leaders—and training them on prophetic priorities.

“Leadership conferences have allowed us to fulfill our doctrinal mandate to ‘[build] up the church and [regulate] all the affairs of the same in all nations’ [Doctrine and Covenants 107:34] under the direction of the First Presidency,” he said.

Collectively, the rich, deep instructive experiences by members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles help guide these local leaders as they make important decisions to encourage and support members through their challenges, Elder Bednar said.

“As we go different places, we feel the goodness of the members,” said Elder Gerrit W. Gong. “We hear the experiences and we learn things that help us to understand as we counsel together as a quorum about what is happening in the different parts of the world and in different groups within the Church.”

Traveling to leadership conferences “gives us the opportunity to interact with wonderful, sweet people,” said Elder Cook. “We go to their homes, and we have a chance to minister to them. . . . It’s the ministering to the Saints that touches our hearts most deeply. We do it with guidance from the Holy Ghost and the Savior and with the knowledge learned by experience, some too sacred to share,” he said.

To the One

After 43 years as a General Authority and now in his fourth decade of service in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President Ballard’s duties have taken him to most of the



The word apostle comes from a Greek word meaning “to be sent.” As with the early Apostles, the Savior still sends His Apostles “into all the world” (Mark 16:15–16).

Elder Ronald A. Rasband said that after his call to the apostleship, he learned that he needed to add extra time to every activity into his life so he can greet Church members and others. “It is not about me,” he said. “It is about the deference and the honor the members of this Church hold for the office of the apostleship.”

Elder Rasband said that during his ordination to the apostleship, he was instructed, “‘We place you in a position to be a special witness of the name of Christ in all the world . . . at all times and in every circumstance.’ Those words were included in my ordination: ‘at all times and in every circumstance.’”

An Important Relationship

The Apostles and the Church’s 70,000-plus full-time missionaries share a sacred, even interdependent, relationship.

The word *apostle* comes from a Greek word meaning “to be sent,” explained Elder Dale G. Renlund. Consider the Savior’s defining charge to His Apostles of old: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15–16).

In following that command, the Twelve are “righteously engaged” in missionary work and delivering the message of the gospel, said President Ballard.

Like Paul of old, today’s Apostles prayerfully delegate their duties to share the gospel with others. And, in apostle-like manner, the missionaries are sent across the globe to teach Christ’s gospel. “It is the Twelve, exercising the keys that they have, who assign them to missions,” said Elder Bednar. “And so we send them.”

The Lord remains the guiding director of missionary work. He authorizes His living Apostles, who are assigned at different times to serve on the Missionary Executive Council, to communicate His desires to the full-time missionaries

countries in the world, allowing him to minister face to face to countless members and missionaries. Millions have tuned in to hear his general conference and devotional talks. But while he has a global responsibility, the Holy Ghost allows him to connect with and bless individuals. This seeming paradox is the Savior’s way, he said. “I sometimes get a letter from someone saying, ‘I was in a meeting, and you said something that changed my life.’ That’s the power of the Holy Ghost. The Lord micromanages His Church.”

A “countless number of sweet, simple experiences with members of the Church all over the world” defines the apostolic ministry, said Elder Bednar. “The Lord sends a member of the Quorum of the Twelve to specific places at particular times where we encounter faithful Latter-day Saints and others who often are struggling or are in need of comfort and reassurance. God orchestrates those interactions,” said Elder Bednar.



President Ballard in Spain



Elder Holland in England



Elder Uchtdorf in Russia

laboring in the field. Such administrative duties go beyond simply “running the organization,” said Elder Bednar. The Apostles hold priesthood keys for the gathering of Israel. “We are providing spiritual oversight and direction so that the work is performed in the way that the Lord wants it,” he said.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf chairs the Church’s Missionary Executive Council. Sitting atop his office desk is a small bronze sculpture of a missionary companionship depicted as pedaling furiously on bicycles, perhaps rushing to a teaching appointment. Whenever he studies that bronze piece, he is reminded of the unbreakable connection between the Apostles and the missionaries. “Every one of the 70,000 missionaries are performing a sacred service and are called by the Lord with a letter from the prophet of God to be representatives of the Savior. They are the extended arm of the Twelve.”

“Whenever we have time, we meet with them,” President Ballard said. “We let them ask questions. We try to help them find, teach, baptize, and strengthen our Heavenly Father’s children.”

Working together, both groups are sent to share the gospel’s good news throughout the world. “We see the full-time missionaries as our companions,” said Elder D. Todd Christofferson.

Misconceptions

While some outside observers might think the Church is led like a corporation, the apostleship “is not like being a business executive; it is quite different,” said Elder Gary E. Stevenson. “The role of an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ is really a ministerial, pastoral role.” The role of being a

witness of Jesus Christ to the world “informs and defines us.”

Elder Neil L. Andersen said that in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, there are no factions, lobbying, or power centers. There are “differing opinions,” but “there are no egos.”

The Lord puts a lot of people together from different professions and backgrounds, Elder Andersen said. But “they are alike in their testimony of the Savior and in their humility. They don’t seek position; they are not trying to be the smartest person in the room. The Lord can work with that. I have never seen anyone [in the Twelve] show anger, and I have never seen anyone put anyone down.”

Humility defines the apostleship, said Elder Uchtdorf. Their callings make them recognizable almost anywhere they travel, “but we know it’s not about us—it’s about Him. We are representing Him. . . . It’s about His greatness.”

We Are All Called to Serve

After the Savior’s death and Resurrection, He instructed His disciples for 40 days and then ascended into heaven. Left

Elder Christofferson in Mexico





Elder Bednar in Peru



Elder Cook in Argentina

with a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—created by the betrayal and death of Judas Iscariot—members of the quorum gathered and petitioned the Lord.

Two men, Matthias and Barsabas, were identified, and the Apostles prayed that the Lord would show “whether of these two thou hast chosen, . . . and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (see Acts 1:23–26).

Then and now, “being called as an Apostle is not an accomplishment or achievement,” explained Elder Renlund. “It’s not a calling that is earned. Matthias, in Acts chapter 1, was selected by God instead of Barsabas. God didn’t tell us why. But the thing we should know is that Barsabas’s testimony honoring the Savior and His Resurrection was equal to that of Matthias.”

God chose, he explained. “If Barsabas fulfilled whatever calling he had, his reward was no different from that which Matthias would have received, provided he magnified his calling.”

Elder Andersen in Brazil



Just as Barsabas’s testimony was equal to Matthias’s testimony, every member of the Church is entitled to and can “develop an apostolic-like relationship with the Lord,” said President Ballard.

Service to the Lord and the Church is “a privilege and a blessing. It is an honor,” said Elder Uchtdorf. “The Lord shows His love for us, and we can show our love to the Lord by doing whatever He asks us to do.”

A Sacred Experience

Being part of a traveling high council is a sacred experience, said Elder Andersen. “When we bear testimony, that testimony goes into the heart of the people, in part, because of our ordination.”

Elder Christofferson said that early in his apostolic ministry, he felt overwhelmed by perceived expectations. But then he received a simple message from the Lord: “Forget about yourself and what people may think of you, whether they are impressed or disappointed or anything else. Just focus on what I want to give them through you. Focus on what I want them to hear through you.”

Several years ago, Elder Christofferson was visiting Mérida, Venezuela, where a little boy, maybe 7 years old, spotted him through a window and began shouting, “*El Apostol, el Apostol!*” (“The Apostle, the Apostle!”).

“That is a very simple incident, but it illustrates to me the depth of appreciation that even children have for the calling,” he said. “It’s not about the person who holds the calling. That child had learned that level of appreciation for the call and what it represents.” ■