

THAT WE MAY

Rejoice Together

By Jennifer Grace Fallon

Church Magazines

My mission companion and I felt excited about our assignment to a new area, and we set to work immediately and with energy, knocking on doors and making contacts in order to find people to teach. At first, it seemed as though the community was filled with people who were ready and willing to receive the Savior's message. In just a few weeks, we found more than 40 people who said they wanted to hear more.

Unfortunately, none of those people ever became progressing investigators. Eventually, my companion and I ended up in the same situation we had been in when we arrived in the area—with an empty teaching pool.

One morning, as I pondered how to help our work progress, the Spirit brought the Savior's words to my mind:

"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

"And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

"And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours" (John 4:35–38).

I felt the Spirit bear witness to me that my companion

and I had been playing the role of the sowers—we had been sowing gospel seeds among all the people we met. And yet sowing seeds was not our primary role as full-time missionaries. The Lord had sent us to reap the seeds that had already been sown by the members in the area, so that "both he that soweth [the member] and he that reapeth [the missionary] may rejoice together."

Getting the Members Involved

Build Confidence

As my companion and I prayed about how to increase member involvement, we felt impressed to follow the counsel found in *Preach My Gospel*: "There are many ways to help the members. For example, help build their faith by teaching them the message of the Restoration and other doctrines of the lessons. Help them feel the Spirit and power of our message. Strengthening their understanding of the doctrine of Christ will do more to increase their trust in you and to build their excitement to do missionary work than anything else you can do."¹

My companion and I took a ward list and prayed about which families we should begin visiting to help them renew their desire to share the gospel. We also counseled with the bishop to know which families to visit regularly.

We put together a few "missionary training lessons" that



My companion and I were having trouble helping our investigators progress. We needed to enlist the members in order to fulfill our purpose as missionaries.

we taught to these families weekly. We did not generate new content for these lessons but relied on the scriptures and content of *Preach My Gospel*, a tool that many had overlooked. These lessons focused on the blessings we receive from the plan of salvation and the joy we encounter as we develop charity.

The point of the lessons was not to implement another program in the Church. They provided a plan to help us establish trust with the members and boost their confidence in their ability to participate in missionary work. Many times we arrived at the homes of these members and the Spirit would prompt us to teach something different from what we had planned.

We also made it a practice to share during these visits the little miracles that my companion and I noticed during the day. Whenever we noticed the Lord guiding us, we made sure to point it out to one another and then share those stories with the families we visited so that they knew Heavenly Father would guide them in their missionary efforts. Our testimony of the Lord's miracles solidified as we recognized them and shared our experiences.

We began to see many miracles unfold in this area. The families we visited became more enthusiastic about missionary work, and their enthusiasm influenced other people in the ward. We began to receive referrals for friends and neighbors who had been prepared through years of interactions to receive the gospel and make sacred covenants. We witnessed families return to activity, new members join the Church, and members share Spirit-filled testimonies with their neighbors during everyday conversations.

Obey with Exactness

In order for the members to trust us with referrals for their friends and neighbors, my companion and I knew that we needed to find ways to improve our interactions with the members. As we pondered what to do, one scripture stood out:

“Behold, verily I say unto you, for this cause I have sent you—that you might be obedient, and that your hearts might be prepared to bear testimony of the things which are to come;

“And also that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand” (D&C 58:6–7).

My companion and I understood from this scripture that we had been sent forth to be obedient, to prepare our hearts to bear pure testimony of the gospel, and to lay the foundation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We set aside time each day to visit with the members, and during those visits we read this scripture, promised to obey the mission rules and the Spirit, shared our testimonies of the gospel, and invited them to join with us in laying the foundation for the Savior's return.

My companion and I looked on our promise of obedience as a solemn pledge, and we tried to conduct ourselves with integrity at all times. The ward began welcoming us into their homes with increased warmth. We had been obedient missionaries before, but communicating our commitment to obedience helped the members understand the type of missionaries we wanted to be.

Heavenly Father showed us that He was pleased with our obedience by providing almost immediate blessings. One evening, my companion and I began praying desperately for guidance as, one by one, our appointments and backup plans fell through. We felt impressed to drive to the other side of our area, but we had nothing to do in that area, and it was getting too late to keep knocking on doors. We decided to follow the prompting anyway. We drove to that neighborhood and prayed fervently to know how the Lord would have us spend our time. A member family that we had not met lived nearby, and we decided to see if they were home. They answered the door and were shocked to see us on their porch. Their friend had asked them to take some time that evening to answer questions about the Church, and they had just sat down with her and said an opening prayer when we knocked on the door. They invited us in and we taught this good family friend about the Restoration.

This experience showed the members that my companion and I were dedicated to following the Spirit. Shortly thereafter, they introduced us to another friend, who studied the gospel and was baptized.

The Transition into Member Missionary Work

I didn't understand at this time in my mission that these experiences with the members would serve as substantial training for me in how to conduct myself as a missionary after I returned home. Before I left for my mission,

I thought missionary work was the responsibility of the missionaries. Now I understand that missionary work is *my* responsibility.

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said it this way: “If you truly progress in the process of becoming a missionary, . . . then when the day arrives for your honorable release as a full-time missionary, you will depart from your field of labor and return to your family—but you will never cease your missionary service. A [disciple of Jesus Christ] is a missionary at all times and in all places.”²

As missionaries (both member and full-time), we are called to “*invite* others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel.”³ Whether the person accepts our invitation is between that person and the Lord. We can count ourselves as true disciples—true missionaries—when we extend the invitation.

It can be hard to extend invitations that are continually rejected, but because I want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, I also want to do my part to feed His sheep (see

John 21:15–17). And I trust that the Savior will guide me, because “every [person] which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God” (Moroni 7:13).

My favorite part about serving a full-time mission was waking up every morning with the knowledge that I was exactly where the Lord wanted me to be and doing exactly the work He wanted me to do. I felt as though I had finally found my life. My transition into member missionary work has been difficult, and I have had to relearn many of the lessons I learned on my mission. As I strengthen my discipleship and obey promptings with exactness, I am slowly becoming the lifelong missionary that I want to be. The Savior is ever patient with me, and I am beginning to experience again His promise: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). ■

NOTES

1. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 161.
2. David A. Bednar, “Becoming a Missionary,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 46.
3. *Preach My Gospel*, 1; emphasis added.

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT CASEY

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

What is the proper relationship between members and full-time missionaries?

“We properly pray for the safety and success of the full-time missionaries throughout the world. And a common element in many of our prayers is a request that the missionaries will be led to individuals and families who are prepared to receive the message of the Restoration. But ultimately it is my responsibility and your responsibility to find people for the missionaries to teach. Missionaries are full-time teachers; you and I are full-time finders. And you and I as lifelong missionaries should not be praying for the full-time missionaries to do our work!

“If you and I would truly pray and ask in faith, as did Joseph Smith [see Joseph Smith—History 1:10–20]—if we would pray with the expectation to act and not just to express—then the work of proclaiming the gospel would move forward in a remarkable way.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Ask in Faith,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 95.