

Me?

A Shepherd in Israel?

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Of the Seventy

One of the practices that distinguishes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that of having lay shepherds. We have no paid clergy in the wards, branches, stakes, and districts of the Church; rather, the members themselves minister to each other.

Every member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a calling to be a shepherd in Israel. Member-shepherds serve in bishoprics and branch presidencies, as priesthood and auxiliary leaders, as clerks and secretaries, as teachers of every kind—including home and visiting teachers—and in countless other capacities.

Lay shepherds have several things in common. Each has sheep to nourish, encourage, and serve. Each is called by the Lord through His appointed servants. Each is accountable to the Lord for his or her stewardship as a shepherd.

Seeking the Lost Sheep

Joseph Serge Merilus left his native Haiti at the age of 19 and moved to the Dominican Republic in 1980 in search of work. Eighteen months later he went back to Haiti, fell in love, and returned to the Dominican Republic with his new bride, Marie Reymonde Esterlin.

As they began their married life together in their newly adopted country, Joseph experienced a spiritual hunger. He and Marie visited several churches seeking to satisfy that hunger, but as Haitian Creole speakers in a Spanish-speaking country, they had difficulty understanding and being understood. Eventually they ran into two Latter-day Saint missionaries, who invited them to church. After Joseph and Marie had attended several meetings, the missionaries patiently taught them the discussions in Spanish, and they were baptized in September 1997.

Joseph was called to serve in the Sunday School presidency, then as a counselor in the branch presidency, and later as branch president. But because of a series of misunderstandings and hurt feelings, much of it resulting from miscommunication, Joseph,



Marie, and their five children fell into inactivity and were largely forgotten by local Church members.

During the next seven years, the couple had four more children and welcomed a nephew and a niece from Haiti into their home. Through much effort Joseph became fluent in Spanish and English and began teaching English and Haitian Creole for a local company.

In August 2007 two priesthood leaders, in the process of seeking out the Lord's lost sheep, appeared on the family's doorstep. They discovered that Joseph and Marie still had testimonies of the gospel, even though they had not attended meetings for seven years. The leaders invited the family to return to church, which they did the very next day—all 13 of them. They have been attending ever since.

Today Joseph is a branch mission leader in Barahona, located in the southwestern part of the Dominican Republic. His two eldest sons also serve in branch leadership, and his nephew, a newly ordained elder, is the Young Men president. Recently the family traveled to the temple, where they were sealed as an eternal family.

Just think of it, 13 lost sheep are now found because two member-shepherds were willing to search for, nourish, and bring this family back to the Lord's fold. They were led to this home just as you and I will be led as we seek out the lost sheep who are our responsibility.

I have been a witness of and a participant in thousands of shepherding visits. I testify to the marvelous outpouring of the Spirit that accompanies them. I have seen many lost sheep return and have felt the joy that



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negligent shepherds. Because of their negligence, the flock had been scattered. Of those shepherds, the Lord said:

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds[:] . . . should not the shepherds feed the flocks? . . .

“The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost. . . .

“ . . . Yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

“Thus saith the Lord God; . . . I will require my flock at their hand” (Ezekiel 34:2, 4, 6, 10).

In many respects, we have become a chapel-based church. We go to great effort to provide spiritual and emotional nourishment for those who come to church, but what of those who have lost their way to the chapel?

If I have received a calling to serve in the Church, then I have sheep to whom I have a divine obligation to minister and to serve. For example, as a teacher I am a shepherd not only to those who show up for my class but also to those who do not attend. I have the responsibility to find them, become acquainted with them, be their friend, minister to their needs, and bring them back to the fold.

comes as they are welcomed back into the fold. I have seen hearts touched, blessings pronounced, tears shed, testimonies borne, prayers offered and answered, and love expressed. I have seen lives changed.

Feeding the Flocks

Sometime between 592 and 570 B.C., God spoke to His prophet Ezekiel regarding



Leading Them Back

As member-shepherds we would do well to remember and ponder the teachings in Luke 15. In that chapter the Lord taught the parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son. All three relate to “that which was lost” and then found again. In the parable of the lost sheep, the Lord asks:

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

“And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.



“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:4–7).

In the parable, only one sheep strayed and was lost, but such is seldom the case in our wards and branches. The parable’s application remains the same, however, regardless of the number of sheep who have strayed from the fold.

The parable does not indicate how long the recovery process took. In our shepherding efforts, some sheep will return after a single visit, while others will require years of constant and gentle encouragement.

During the process of recovering our brothers and sisters, let us not forget that the sheep we are “bringing . . . back to the fold” are “dear to the heart of the Shepherd.”¹ He knows each one of them individually. He loves each one of them with a perfect love. Because they are His, He will guide us, direct us, and inspire us in what to say if we will ask and then listen to the voice of the Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, many will respond positively as we sincerely and humbly reach out.

May we remember our responsibilities as shepherds so that we can give a good accounting to the Lord regarding our stewardship over the sheep He has assigned to each of us. ■

NOTE

1. “Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd,” *Hymns*, no. 221.



WATCHING OVER THE SHEEP

“We are shepherds watching over Israel. The hungry sheep look up, ready to be fed the bread of life. . . . Our task is to reach out to those who, for whatever reason, are in need of our help.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “True to Our Priesthood Trust,” *Liahona and Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 57–58.