

“A CONTAGIOUS

One Kentucky ward's efforts have inspired everyone from the high priests to the Primary to focus on temple work.

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When the rest of the Elizabethtown Ward members arrived at the Louisville Kentucky Temple in August 2008, Steve and Julia Park were already there. Not even the hour-long drive through torrential Kentucky rains kept these new converts from arriving on time. In fact, the Parks, a retired couple who had been sealed only a year before, had arrived well before the rest of the ward members so they could perform work for some ancestors.

That night, the Parks were joined by priesthood leaders, youth, youth leaders, family history consultants, young single adults, and others with recommends. More than 40 members, including four new converts attending for the first time, had set aside half a day to attend. They had caught the vision of a unified and devoted effort of worshipping





the Lord through temple service, and by the end of the evening it showed in their countenances.

Creating a Ward Vision

Although the ward is energized now, it hasn't always been successful in encouraging family history work and temple work on a broad scale. Several years ago, Elizabethtown Ward leaders, under the direction of Bishop Kirk Chadwick, recognized that the ward could do more. The family history center, which later would play an important part in helping ward members prepare their family names for temple work, frequently lacked patrons. And though converts were being strengthened by attending the temple, the ward as a whole still needed a functioning plan.

The ward council began to capture that vision more fully when Leslie Bower, director of the family history center, brought several ideas to a ward council meeting. The plan was simple: ward leaders, assisted by the high priest group leader, would help members by teaching and reminding them frequently about temple covenants, the sacred nature of saving ordinances, and saving their kindred dead.

Leslie helped explain the potential impact of the plan by expanding on the symbolism of a family tree. As ward members would work to find and prepare family names for temple work and then participate in the

Above: Elizabethtown Ward members at the Louisville Kentucky Temple. Above right: The Louisville Kentucky Temple. Left: Family history consultant Gaye Hill and family history center director Leslie Bower helped members catch the vision of family history work.

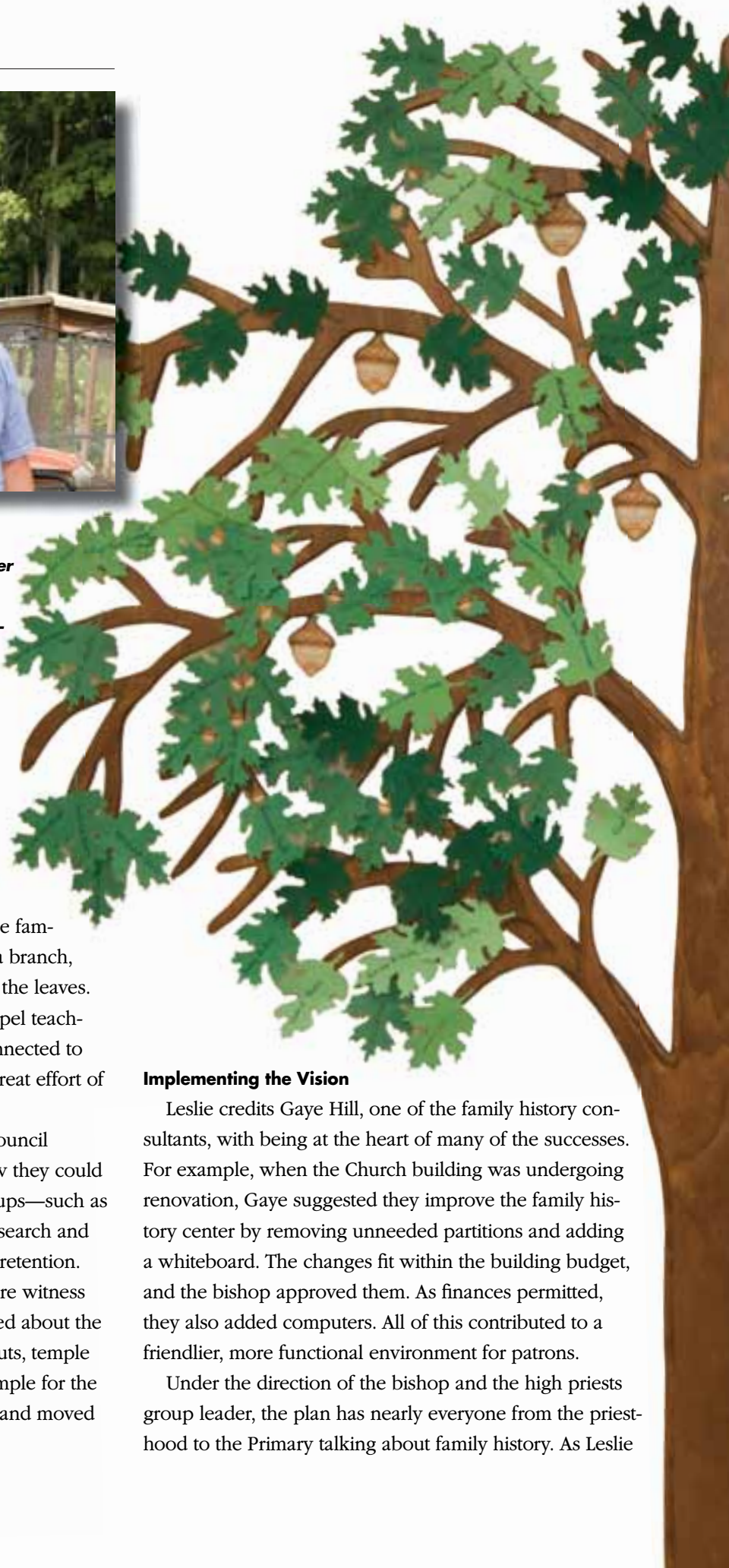


For Gary and Becky Giewald (above), the temple is a place of strength and refuge. Center image: Ward members place their names on the leaves and acorns of this tree as they complete their family history and temple goals. It has inspired and united them.

ordinances—either directly themselves or indirectly by asking others to perform the ordinances for them—they could grow together. Although many worked individually, ward members would assist each other to do the research and preparation for the ordinance work. The ward could represent the family tree as the trunk, with every family being a branch, and individuals and their family names being the leaves. The whole enterprise would be rooted in gospel teachings about salvation. Members would feel connected to their families and to each other through the great effort of temple work.

As Leslie finished her presentation, ward council members excitedly discussed ideas about how they could implement this plan with their respective groups—such as youth trips to the local cemetery for family research and name preservation, temple trips, and convert retention.

Bishop Chadwick relates that “the Spirit bore witness that this is what we needed to do. So we talked about the youth and the genealogy merit badge for Scouts, temple preparation classes, and folks going to the temple for the first time. We immediately sustained the plan and moved forward. It really had a great impact.”



Implementing the Vision

Leslie credits Gaye Hill, one of the family history consultants, with being at the heart of many of the successes. For example, when the Church building was undergoing renovation, Gaye suggested they improve the family history center by removing unneeded partitions and adding a whiteboard. The changes fit within the building budget, and the bishop approved them. As finances permitted, they also added computers. All of this contributed to a friendlier, more functional environment for patrons.

Under the direction of the bishop and the high priests group leader, the plan has nearly everyone from the priesthood to the Primary talking about family history. As Leslie

FOUR NEW CONVERTS ATTEND THE TEMPLE

Four young single adult converts, accompanied by their Young Single Adult (YSA) representative and other friends, attended the temple for the first time on August 13, 2008, to perform baptisms for the dead. Three of them, Bridjette MacDonald,



Alan Howard, and Shanice Drumgold, had been members of the Church for about four months. Another new member, Justin Perez, had been a member for two years.

For Shanice, age 20, this temple trip made a huge impact on her life. “Going to the temple was the greatest experience that I could have had.” It strengthened her faith—something she was grateful for because her family members were not supportive of her decision to be baptized. “I’m glad I went when I did,” she says.

Bridjette, age 21, felt humbled by the experience. “Later that evening I realized it was amazing to think that we were doing God’s work and that I am worthy to do that. It made me feel so good.”

Each of these new converts felt inspired by the beauty and Spirit in the Lord’s house. “When you walk in it’s just an overwhelming feeling,” explains Alan, age 24. “People off the street can’t just walk in there. It is a temple of the Lord.”

Noting how important it is to pay attention in the temple, Justin, age 23, says, “I didn’t feel the Spirit overwhelming me at first. But when I focused and closed my eyes, it was there.”

One thing that particularly touched these new converts was the experience of performing vicarious work for others. Alan relates: “I had this overwhelming feeling of happiness—not for myself but for the people I was being baptized for. It’s just a great feeling to know that someone was pleased.”

says, the plan “has resulted in new members going to the temple more quickly than they ever did before. It has had this snowball effect through the ward where we are seeing more and more activity in temple and family history work.”

The ward saw many other results. For example, most of the youth in the ward participated in a trip to an unregistered cemetery to record names for the National Registry of Cemeteries.

The Scouts began working on the genealogy merit badge. The ward saw a sharp increase in volunteers willing to index U.S. census records at www.familysearch.org.

Primary leaders engaged the children in family history activities. There was wide participation in family home evenings, where the focus was family history group records. Also, many of the members began helping others do their family history work.

As Leslie’s husband, Dave, the high priests group leader, puts it, “Basically, we implemented family history in every aspect of the ward.” Family history, yes, but at its heart the ward focused on service that led to the temple itself.

Soon the family history center was busy. “We used to be this broom closet at the end of the hall,” Leslie says. “And now it’s a packed house of members who want to get their family to the temple.”

Built on a Foundation of Love

In many ways, implementing the plan was easy for members in the Elizabethtown Ward, for they have long had a sense of unity and fellowship that moves them to reach out to each other. For example, Gary and Becky Giewald felt a warmth and tenderness from the time they started investigating the Church in 2004.

YOUTH CEMETERY TRIP

In July 2008 the Elizabethtown Ward youth went to an old local cemetery to collect names for data preservation. They tried the traditional method of rubbing charcoal across paper placed against the stones, but weathering had made the stones unreadable. Then Sister Leslie Bower felt inspired to rub a light dirt film on the stones, and suddenly the names and dates of most stones appeared. Afterward, youth cleaned the dirt off the stones. They were as excited as everyone, and the activity was a great success.



as doing their family research was, being in the temple itself touched the Giewalds even more. “When we did the baptisms,” Becky recalls, “I was overwhelmed with the spirit of the people I was being baptized for—my grandmothers, my aunts. Every time I heard their names read I felt like they wanted us to do this, that they were glad we finally did it. And when we each received our own endowment about a year later, I was overwhelmed. I know we

After the Giewalds were baptized, several couples in the ward provided sincere, supportive friendships that encouraged participation in faith-promoting activities. In addition, ward leaders followed counsel from the stake president, Lyle Stucki, to have new converts engage in family history and attend the temple to do baptisms for the dead within 90 days of their own baptism.

“My first calling was in the family history center,” says Gary. “I began working on my family history almost immediately.” Three months after being baptized, the Giewalds were ready to attend the temple to perform baptisms for their ancestors. Gary smiles fondly as he recalls that “the first time we went to the temple I took my family file cards. I basically got my four generations finished.”

As exciting





As Scouts earned the genealogy merit badge, Rob Brown helped them focus on the temple.

were doing what we were supposed to be doing.”

When Steve and Julia Park were baptized in 2006, the Giewalds invited them over for socializing at home and took them on temple trips, repeating this pattern of caring. Soon the Parks were attending the temple at least quarterly on the youth temple trips, and sometimes as often as twice a month. As they have attended, their knowledge, faith, and testimonies have grown. Ward members continue the pattern of caring and shepherding with each new convert who joins the Church in their ward.

A Contagious Fire

“We try to plan our activities around that focus and keep the temple at the center of what we’re striving for and everything we do,” says Rob Brown, the Young Men president. “It’s a contagious movement through the ward to make it to the temple and do family history work. It’s just a contagious fire.”

The adult leaders have certainly felt that fire, and so have the youth. Megan Robinson, age 13, attended the temple for the second time and participated in ordinances for five family names. “I loved it. I felt something inside me—the Spirit.” Because of her example, her brother, Braxton, age 10, can’t wait until his turn comes to perform baptisms and confirmations.

Other youth had similar experiences. One young

man, Ethan Westover, age 18, commented that he hadn’t attended the temple on a youth trip before moving to the ward a year earlier. Now he attends every youth trip the ward takes because he feels so excited to go.

Chris Coleman, age 14, says, “I love the Church. I love going to the temple.” Chris feels particularly grateful that he can receive answers to prayers in the temple.

As Rob explains, much of the success comes from activities planned to teach principles that strengthen testimonies and at the same time provide an enjoyable experience. As a result, when the ward plans temple trips, the youth don’t see them as onerous—they want to go, and so they make the sacrifice. “They make the temple a priority,” he says.

Activities and instruction follow this same principle at all levels, from the Primary children to the youth to

new converts. Ward efforts culminate in quarterly temple trips that include the youth, adults, and new adult converts. As they participate together, ward members develop strength, faith, and unity both individually and collectively.

Consider Will Chadwick. Having grown up in a family that honored the temple and having been a part of the ward as the plan to energize temple attendance developed, he gained a love for the temple

and a greater perspective of his eternal significance. As he was preparing to enter his freshman year at Brigham Young University in Provo in the fall of 2008, he explained that in the temple “I feel peaceful, I feel loved. My part in the plan of salvation is better known to me.”

Through their combined efforts, members of the Elizabethtown Ward have dramatically increased family history work and temple worship. As they have done so they have increased their faith and found the joy that comes through dedicating one’s life to the service of the Lord. ■



HAVENS OF PEACE

“Temples will bless all who attend them and who sacrifice for their completion. The light of Christ will shine on all—even those who have gone beyond.”

President Thomas S. Monson, “For I Was Blind, But Now I See,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 56.