

# SERVING Beyond Jordan

*Or wherever else the Lord needs you.*

**By R. Val Johnson and Rachel Coleman**

Church Magazines and Publishing Services

**T**he need was critical.

In early 2013, five cases of measles broke out in the Za'atari refugee camp in the Middle Eastern country of Jordan. More than 100,000 Syrian refugees, living in overcrowded conditions, were at risk of contracting this highly contagious, dangerous virus. The Jordanian government planned a massive immunization campaign to keep the disease from spreading. The plan was to immunize at least 90,000 Syrian refugees between the ages of 6 months and 30 years within a two-week period.

But there was a problem. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) had the serum. The Jordanian Ministry of Health had the clinics. What they didn't have were cold-chain supply items—syringes, containers for sharp instruments, serum coolers—and time was running out.<sup>1</sup>

Enter Ron and Sandi Hammond, senior welfare missionaries serving as country directors in Jordan for LDS Charities. As Ron and Sandi already had working relationships with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health, they quickly joined the collaboration between these organizations to determine how LDS Charities could help.

Ron says, “We inquired about the cost of purchasing the cold-chain supply items. When they told us, we said, ‘We think LDS Charities can help.’ They said, ‘How fast? We’ve got to get moving on this!’”

Within 20 hours LDS Charities had approved the purchase of the necessary cold-chain supplies. “When we informed the Ministry of Health and UNICEF,” Ron says, “they were awestruck. How could an NGO [non-governmental organization] move so quickly? Not only did the immunization campaign go forward on schedule, but it also inspired a nationwide campaign that inoculated hundreds of thousands of Jordanians and Syrian refugees.”

Crisis averted.

Furthermore, this productive partnership among UNICEF, Jordan's Ministry of



**LDS Charities helped immunize 90,000 Syrian refugees for measles.**



Health, and LDS Charities created the potential for future collaboration.

How Ron and Sandi Hammond arrived at that important moment in the Middle East is a testament of the Hammonds' faith and the inspiration behind the Church's senior missionary program.

### **Needed: Missionary Couples**

In 2012 the Hammonds were serving as ordinance workers in the Rexburg Idaho Temple. Ron had a successful dental practice and was teaching in the Religion Department at Brigham Young University–Idaho. But the serene routine of their lives changed abruptly with a distinct spiritual impression to immediately submit papers to serve a mission. The timing surprised them. Their married children were in various stages of career moves and relocations, and Ron was not yet looking to retire. But the Spirit assured them that they were needed and that all would be well.

As it turned out, priesthood leaders at Church headquarters had been fasting and praying to find the right couple to serve as country directors for LDS Charities in Amman, Jordan.

"It was so evident," says Sandi, "that the Lord was out ahead of us, preparing the details of the specific assignment

*Amman, Jordan*



He had for us. We know that He does this for every missionary who serves. It is comforting knowing that the Savior is arranging things for you to serve before you ever arrive."

"In retrospect," Ron says, "we are grateful we were neither specific nor insistent on where we wished to serve. Leaving such matters in the Lord's hands allowed Him to give us an experience we would not have had otherwise."

That experience included working with Jordan's royal family on humanitarian projects of interest to the royals. The Hammonds collaborated with local hospitals and clinics to provide training to Jordanian medical staff on life-saving neonatal resuscitation skills, resulting in a significant reduction in mortality among newborns. Through their efforts and the efforts of other missionary couples, LDS Charities

### **HOW TO HAVE THE BEST 6 OR 12 OR 18 OR 23 MONTHS OF YOUR LIFE**

**A** couple can serve a mission of 6, 12, 18, or 23 months, depending on their situation.

In addition, the biggest financial cost of a mission—housing—has been made manageable by limiting the cost of housing to no more than U.S. \$1,400 for couples serving

from the United States, Canada, western Europe, Japan, and Australia. Those from all other countries pay what they can afford.

For information on applying for missionary service and to read more stories of couples who have had the best months of their lives serving missions, go to [lds.org/callings/missionary/senior](https://lds.org/callings/missionary/senior).



provided training and equipment to vision clinics and organizations serving those with physical disabilities. Among those that the Hammonds and other welfare missionaries supported was a center that teaches women with physical disabilities how to design and make specialty clothing and craft items. These skills gave students the opportunity to better provide for themselves and their families.

Other projects included working with other NGOs and the Jordanian government on emergency response and screening Jordanian students to receive one of two scholarships each year to attend Brigham Young University. One of the most satisfying experiences the Hammonds had was working with the Latin Catholic Church to build school rooms for Iraqi Christians who had nowhere else to meet.

### **With the Lord in His Vineyard**

While in Jordan the Hammonds learned how true the Lord's promise is to those who serve Him: "I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left,



*Ron and Sandi Hammond and other humanitarian missionaries worked with the royal family of Jordan to decrease the mortality of newborns there.*

and my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88).

"God is involved in the work," Ron says. "He is down in the vineyard with His servants. Any couple who goes on a mission is joined in the vineyard by the Lord of the vineyard. We don't believe in miracles in Jordan; we lived them."

Indisputably, the angels they felt "round about" them included the heavenly variety, but they also included the mortal variety, especially their children, who supported their decision to serve so far from home.

And their family in turn was blessed by the Lord's protective, sustaining power. Significant career and relocation decisions were made, and concerns with potential birth complications were resolved as their children turned to the Lord, counseled together, and prayed and fasted for one another.

The blessings their children received were so remarkable that when Brother and Sister Hammond were invited to extend their two-year mission to three, each of their children expressed enthusiastic support. They sensed the Lord was doing something very special for them as a direct result of their parents' service.

Still, the separation the Hammond family felt was a sacrifice. Being halfway around the world from those they loved was difficult. But it wasn't as difficult as it would have been in the past. Technology made it possible for the family to be involved in one another's lives as often as needed. Sandi says, "Couples don't lose contact with their families. We kept in frequent contact with our children's families back home. Because of FaceTime and emails, our four new grandchildren, born while we served, knew us and were warm and welcoming when we returned."

### **Opening Eyes and Hearts**

Among the many blessings the Hammonds feel they received from their service is having their eyes opened to the generosity and friendliness of the Jordanian people. When the Hammonds first received their call, they were uncertain about the people they would be serving.

"But we found our Muslim friends to be gentle and





***One concern for potential couple missionaries is being away from children and grandchildren at important times in their lives. The Hammonds learned that, in remarkable ways, the Lord blesses the families of couples who serve and that technology enables them to remain close even if half a world away.***

generous,” Ron says, “and we are certain that had they sensed we were ever in harm’s way, they would have gone out of their way to protect us.

“Their charity is amazing. Jordanians can’t bear knowing others are going without if they can help. They have been welcoming refugees since pre-Davidic times. The Bible contains many references to ‘beyond Jordan,’ and we began signing our letters ‘Beyond Jordan’ as recognition of the compassionate service we were privileged to provide in this historically compassionate country. For centuries Jordan has been a place of charity, and the Lord has blessed the people for it.”

Working so closely with the Jordanian people enabled the Hammonds to develop some strong friendships. “We were invited to several Iftar meals, the meal that ends the daily Ramadan fast,” Sandi says. “Our Muslim friends also invited us to attend engagement parties, weddings, and other family-focused occasions.”

The Church doesn’t proselyte or permit baptisms of Muslims in Jordan or anywhere else where the law forbids it, so the Hammonds didn’t share information about the

Church. Instead, they focused on building and maintaining relationships—with the royal family, local humanitarian partners, other couple missionaries serving with them, and religious and government leaders. When asked for details about the Church, the Hammonds encouraged inquirers to visit [LDS.org](http://LDS.org).

### **The Call to Serve**

Considering the remarkable experiences Ron and Sandi had, do they feel they are somehow special among couples called to serve—or that could be called to serve?

Yes—and no. “We served where and when the Lord needed a couple with our specific skills and life experiences,” the Hammonds say. “But that’s true for all senior missionaries.

Every couple with the ability to serve a mission has been prepared to serve in ways special to them. They just need to exercise faith enough to go where the Lord has need of them, and He will use them to make a difference in the lives of others.”

“Couples can make a difference,” said Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. “Couples can accomplish remarkable things no one else can do. . . .

“ . . . The ways in which couples can serve are virtually limitless. From mission office support and leadership training to family history, temple work, and humanitarian service—there is an opportunity to use almost any skill or talent with which the Lord has blessed you. . . .

“ . . . You have received much in your life; go forth and freely give in the service of our Lord and Savior. Have faith; the Lord knows where you are needed. The need is so great, brothers and sisters, and the laborers are so few.”<sup>2</sup> ■

### **NOTES**

1. See “Mass Vaccination Campaigns in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey Amid Measles Outbreaks,” Apr. 30, 2013, [unicef.org](http://unicef.org).
2. Robert D. Hales, “Couple Missionaries: A Time to Serve,” *Ensign*, May 2001, 26, 27.