

# Bridges of Friendship



By Wendy L. Marshall

**J**oining the Church is a leap of faith. Often in moving closer to the

Lord, converts are stepping away from family, friends, work, and social situations they've been a part of for a long time. Old lives and old habits are voluntarily left behind in order to obey the Savior's admonition to "come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

In fulfilling our role as member missionaries and as friends, we can provide a bridge for new members and investigators as they make their leaps of faith. When I made my own leap of faith 25 years ago, ward members offered friendship in three very important ways.

First, I was immediately struck by the number of people who attended my baptism. It meant a lot to them that I had decided to join the Church, and they came to congratulate me and wish me well.

Second, ward members promised me that the Shepherd knew my voice. All I had to do was listen for His. They answered questions and encouraged me to study, pray, and be patient and my prayers would be answered.

Third, they warned me that as imperfect human beings, they might make mistakes or unintentionally do something to offend me. "Don't ever let our mistakes chase you away from the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is true," they told me.

Unfortunately, just as converts are drawn to the Church because of friends, they can be diverted away from the gospel by "friends" who follow something other than the Lord's agenda. Elder Malcolm S. Jeppsen, formerly of the Quorum of the Seventy, said in his April 1990 general

conference address: "A true friend is someone who makes it easier to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Don't ever be led into displeasing your Father in Heaven by your friends who might ask that as a condition of being your friend, you must choose between their way and the Lord's way."<sup>1</sup>

When my nephew returned from his mission in Japan, he spoke of the wonderful lesson of friendship he'd learned—that all the little things he and his companions had done for the Japanese people as their friends had brought about great things. By daily showing love to the people, there was a new warmth and acceptance toward the Church. At his homecoming, he said, "I can continue my mission here by being a friend."

Being a friend is perhaps one of our most important missions. *Friendship* is simply another word for *fellowship*, which is another word for *love*. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that friendship is among the fundamental principles of our faith. It is designed "to revolutionize and civilize the world."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Himself said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Such a sacrifice has not been asked of many, but in my life, I have seen friends offer nearly everything else. In doing so, these friends show their love by helping new members across the bridges as they come unto Christ. ■

## NOTES

1. Malcolm S. Jeppsen, "Who Is a True Friend?" *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May (1990), 45; see also Robert D. Hales, "The Aaronic Priesthood: Preparing for the Decade of Decision," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2007, 49.
2. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 318.