

# How to Lead the Member Missionary Work in the Stake and the Ward

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## Being Personal Leaders

Many of the most faithful members of the church follow false principles when they attempt to share the gospel. They sift through all the people they know, to judge which of those might be “prepared.” They spend untold hours cultivating friendships with those they feel might be interested, in the belief that they must “prepare” people before they can be invited. Their “sales pitch” focuses on how much the church can do for them; and they feel that they have failed if those they invite do not take the discussions or get baptized. These (and a few others) are incorrect principles. Following these practices has caused many members to be intimidated by missionary work. We have learned that when we follow correct principles in our efforts to share the gospel, however, it becomes a delight. Some of these principles are:

1. *We cannot predict in advance – and in fact we should not pre-judge – whether someone might be prepared to accept the gospel. We simply need to share the gospel in an honest and open way with as many people as possible. Some of them will prove to be interested. (Matt 7:1; 13: 54-58; John 10:19-39.)*

2. *We needn't transform people into friends before we invite them. We can invite anyone – friends, neighbors, work & school associates, and strangers. When we invite them in a sincere way so that they can feel our love for them, honest people will be flattered, and not offended, by our invitations. (John 4)*

3. *Most people – especially those who are prosperous and content with their lives – have a deeper need to give service than to receive help. When we invite people to serve with us in doing the work of the Lord, they often feel the Spirit and see the meaning that the gospel can bring to their lives. (Mark 8:35; John 7:17)*

4. *We succeed when we invite. Our responsibility is to give people a chance to exercise their free agency; and it is their responsibility to make the right choice. If we don't invite they are not free to choose. This negates the very purpose for which God placed them here (2 Ne. 2:16).*

5. *Often our instincts are to exempt ourselves from the command to share the gospel because we're so busy serving the Lord. If we're too busy to do what God has commanded, and yet we are desperate to do it, God will bless us with miracles. When He trusts that we'll invite them, He will put people in our paths. (1 Ne. 3:7)*

No area seventy, stake president or bishop can be an effective leader of the member missionary effort unless he can speak in first-person pronouns and present-tense verbs about doing it. Visualize your challenge this way: It is as if the members of the church are walking across a glacier and are huddled along the edge of a deep crevasse, unable to progress because they're afraid to jump across. The crevasse is member missionary work. If church leaders try to push the members from the rear, they will dig in and resist. If instead you ask them to step aside; jump across yourself; and then turn around to say with a helping hand, “This is a delightful, faith-building experience! Here's how to do it. Let me help you,” then many members will follow your lead.

## Tools and Techniques that Can Be Helpful

We've found the following practices to be helpful in implementing these principles.

### Setting a date

Deadlines help us get things done. Elder Ballard has promised that if we will set a date as a commitment to God that we will to everything we can to find someone for the missionaries to teach, He will bless us to find

someone. Setting a date hasn't worked for many of those who set dates because don't take the commitment seriously enough. The promise is that *if we will do all that we can*, God will bless us to find someone. When we become so desperate that we are fasting frequently, praying daily; and trying to engage in gospel conversations with everyone we meet, then God learns that He can trust us. He will then put people in our path, knowing that when He does, we will invite them.

### **Use “Mormon words” in conversations**

Make a habit of using “Mormon” phrases in your conversations—referring to activities at church, children who are serving missions, experiences you've had or lessons you've learned in Church assignments, and so on. When we use these phrases, it is as if we are opening a door, inviting the other person to walk in and talk about the Church. Most people choose not to come through that door, and that's fine. But sometimes they'll ask you about the Church. You can then answer their questions. And if it seems appropriate, you can open a second door—inviting them to a Church meeting or to come to your home so you can tell them more. Most of those you'll invite will decline, but that's okay. Some accept. It literally is unpredictable (see principles 1&4 above) – meaning that the more people you invite, the more will accept. Regardless of the outcome, you will find that if they feel your love when you invite them, and if you invite in an honest, straightforward way, they nearly always will express gratitude that you would care enough to invite them.

### **Make it easy for them to say, “No thanks.”**

When I have the opportunity to invite, this language has become easy and comfortable to me: “Feel free to say no to this invitation. But at some point, if you ever have the interest, we'd love to have you in our home and just explain a bit about what makes Mormons tick.” This makes it easy for uninterested people to decline, and for interested people to accept – so nobody feels awkward.

### **Instead of just teaching them the gospel, teach them *how to learn the gospel, and how to know it is true.***

When we have the opportunity to teach someone, we've learned to follow the same process with our investigators that *Preach My Gospel* (pp. 107-112) recommends for the missionaries to follow when *they* study the gospel. The missionaries are taught to follow these four steps: 1) Start with a question; 2) Find passages of scripture that will help them formulate answers to their question; 3) Write down their conclusions and feelings; and 4) Pray to know if what they wrote, and what they read, are true. Before we started following this process with our investigators, about one in five of those who accepted an initial meeting with us was baptized. Since we began following this method, about two in five have accepted baptism: The yield has doubled.

People will learn when they're ready to learn, not when we're ready to teach them. So when someone has accepted my invitation, I then ask: “Rather than our telling you what we think you should know about our church, could you please come with a list of questions about religion to which you've not yet been able to find satisfactory answers?” Then we draw on the lessons in *Preach My Gospel* to answer their questions. After each lesson with the missionaries, we give our friends a “homework” assignment, to read passages in the Book of Mormon from which they can distill answers to their questions. We ask them to write down their answers, and then teach them how to pray to know if what they wrote, and what they read, are true. At the next lesson we ask them to explain their answers to their questions, and we invite them to bear testimony of what they learned. After they teach us, then we teach them.

You can find additional suggestions for how to be a great member missionary at [missionaryleaders.org](http://missionaryleaders.org).

## **The Stake President's Perspective: Leading Missionary Work in the Stake**

For a number of years the baptisms in the Yorktown NY Stake had been flat, between 40 and 50 per year. Most of those baptisms were among the Spanish-speaking individuals living within the boundaries of the

stake. At our stake conference in late 2006, the visiting authorities, Elders Marlin K. Jensen and Clayton Christensen, challenged our stake to do better in our missionary activities. Elders Clayton Christensen and Kim Smith subsequently agreed to return for a special stake training meeting, with the caveat that the stake needed to commit in advance to follow through on the recommendations that they would make on how to create and implement ward mission plans. The stake leadership was happily willing to commit.

## **Training**

We invited the ward council members of each ward in the stake to this training meeting, during which the following items were covered:

1. The First Presidency's letter, *Missionary Work in the Ward*, doesn't suggest that ward mission plans are an option that ward leaders might weigh as they contemplate whether and how they might carry out the mandate God has given them to lead missionary work in their ward area. Rather, we have been told that each ward should create and implement a ward mission plan, and that it must be effective in enrolling all ward members in a united effort to build the Kingdom of God through convert baptisms and reactivation.
2. Every ward mission plan should be built on a foundation comprised of three elements: 1) The vision that ward leaders have for their ward five years hence; 2) Specific goals for member referrals and growing sacrament meeting attendance that the ward needs to achieve in the coming year in order to progress towards that vision; and 3) the commitment of ward leaders to lead by example. I as stake president committed in the meeting that I would have a family taught the gospel in our home by the end of the year.
3. The ward mission plan is built as each quorum and auxiliary organization in the ward places upon this foundation a "building block" – a commitment of something they will do regularly to contribute to the ward's vision and goals for growing the ward and finding people for the missionaries to teach. These building blocks and the foundation upon which they're placed comprise the ward mission plan. It typically can be written on one page. Examples of these building blocks and plans were discussed in the meeting.<sup>1</sup>
4. The capstone of a good ward mission plan is a method by which ward council members will hold themselves accountable monthly for achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Ward mission leaders were taught how to follow-up with ward council members on whether they met their monthly commitment in the ward mission plan.
5. Elders Smith and Christensen, and various stake members bore witness that missionary success was possible by following these few simple steps.

## **Role of the High Councilor for Missionary Work**

In the weeks subsequent to the stake training meeting, to ensure that that each ward council completed the assignments to which they committed themselves in the training meeting, our stake high councilor for missionary work followed through by doing the following five things:

1. Ensured that each ward mission leader understood and followed through in his important role in helping the bishop guide the development of the plan, and knew how to follow up in ward council meeting on the commitments that comprised the building blocks that each ward organization had made in the ward mission plan.
2. Gathering the ward mission plan for each unit.

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<sup>1</sup> The training material, including sample building blocks and ward mission plans, can be found in the booklet, "Leading a Great Ward Mission," and on the website [missionaryleaders.org](http://missionaryleaders.org).

3. Finalizing the goals that each ward had set for referrals to the missionaries and for increasing sacrament meeting attendance.
4. Training all newly called ward mission leaders to ensure that they understood their role in helping the members of the ward council to hold themselves accountable for achieving the objectives in the ward mission plan.
5. Reporting back monthly to the stake presidency on key elements of the effort.

The high councilor for missionary work played a critical role in the stake's success in this effort.

**Additionally, as stake president I did the following:**

1. Personally fulfilled my commitment to have families we had invited taught by the missionaries in our home.
2. One of the most important of the principles of member missionary work that was taught in our training meeting was that people living in comfortable circumstances often have a deeper need to give service than to receive help. I frequently taught in stake meetings that the easiest way to invite friends to participate in our meetings was to ask them to serve with us in some way. We encouraged each organization as part of its building block in the ward mission plan, to plan each month to invite a non-member, for example, to teach an enrichment class, lead an achievement day activity, teach a merit badge class, etc. This insight was critical in helping the various ward organizations to understand how simple it would be for them to complete their commitment in the ward mission plan.
3. In each PPI with my bishops I confirmed that he was allowing time in each ward council for the ward mission leader to follow up with the ward organizations on their success.
4. Quarterly we reviewed each ward's results against the ward mission plan, including new members baptized, total sacrament meeting attendance and referrals to missionaries from members.
5. I met monthly with the zone leaders to ensure that I understood from their perspective how well each ward was implementing its ward mission plan, including how involved the missionaries were in understanding the objectives and execution of the plan. I also attended the zone meeting a couple of times during the year to hear first hand from the missionaries what was working and what was not.

**The results:**

The number of baptisms in the Yorktown Stake roughly doubled from the prior year; and our stake moved from having the lowest baptisms per missionary companionship to among the highest in the mission. Most interestingly, this process introduced a number of strong families to the gospel that may not have been found by the missionaries. Asking friends of other faiths to serve side by side with our members was met with enthusiasm by non-members and allowed them early in their involvement with the Church to feel the spirit that comes from service. Member referrals now comprise a much larger portion of the total baptisms in the stake. More of these new members have become strong, contributing members in their wards than historically was the case.

**The Bishop's Responsibility to Lead Missionary Work**

In May, 2002, the First Presidency announced that bishops would be responsible for leading missionary work in the ward. Placing responsibility for missionary success squarely on the shoulders of the bishop was an enormous shift. When I became bishop, in order to give missionary work the priority this demanded on top of

all my other responsibilities, I needed truly to believe that the energy we devoted to leading the missionary effort would magnify, rather than diminish, the effectiveness of all else that we were trying to do.

Some friends compiled for me a list of the promises God has made in the Doctrine and Covenants to those that engage in missionary work. These promises, which I've summarized in the table below (with the section and verse), have convinced me that if our bishops will inspire the members of their wards to share the gospel and find people for the missionaries to teach, we indeed will be richly blessed.

<p><b>Power and Strength as you Serve the Lord</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None shall stay you (1:5).</li> <li>• You will have the power of God unto the convincing of men (11:21).</li> <li>• The gates of hell shall not prevail against you (17:8).</li> <li>• You shall receive strength such as is not known among men (24:12).</li> <li>• I myself will go with you and be in your midst. Nothing shall prevail against you. (32:3).</li> <li>• Your mouth shall be filled and you shall become even as Nephi of old (33:8).</li> <li>• Your arm will be God's arm. He will be your shield and buckler; He will gird up your loins; and put your enemies under your feet (35:14).</li> <li>• Power shall rest upon you. You shall have great faith. I will be with you, and go before your face (39:12).</li> <li>• Your enemies will not have power over you (44:5).</li> <li>• Your words shall be scripture; shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, and shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation (68:4).</li> <li>• The Lord will stand by you (68:6).</li> <li>• No weapon formed against you shall prosper (71:9).</li> <li>• You will not be confounded. It shall be given you in the very hour that portion that shall be meted unto every man (84:85; 100: 5)</li> <li>• I will uphold you (93:51).</li> <li>• You shall have power to declare my word (99:2).</li> <li>• The Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record of all things, whatsoever ye shall say (100:8).</li> <li>• I will bear you up as on eagles' wings; and you shall beget glory and honor to yourself and unto the Lord's name (124:18).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Personal Purity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You shall stand blameless before God (4:2).</li> <li>• Your sins will be forgiven (31:5; 36:1; 60:7; 62:3; 84:61).</li> <li>• You will be able to keep God's laws (44:5).</li> <li>• The Lord will make you holy (60:7).</li> </ul> <p><b>Faith</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will be given a testimony of the words of the prophets (21:9).</li> <li>• You shall have revelations (28:8).</li> </ul> <p><b>Happiness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your joy shall be great (18:14-15).</li> </ul> <p><b>Prosperity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You shall have blessings greater than the "treasures of earth" (19:37-38).</li> <li>• Your back shall be laden with sheaves (31:5; 33:9).</li> <li>• I will take care of your flocks (88:72).</li> <li>• Your family shall live (31:5). The Lord will prepare a place for your family (31:6). I will provide for your families; and an effectual door shall be opened for them, from henceforth (118:3).</li> </ul> <p><b>Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb nor joint ... and you shall not go hungry, neither athirst (84:80)</li> <li>• A hair from your head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed (84:80, 116).</li> </ul> <p><b>The Holy Spirit Will Be With You</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will send upon you the Comforter, which shall teach you the truth and the way whither you shall go (79:2).</li> <li>• I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left; my Spirit shall be in your hearts, and mine angels round about you, to bear you up. (84:88).</li> </ul>
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What bishop wouldn't want these promises to be fulfilled in the lives of each member of his ward? What parents wouldn't want them for their children? What individuals wouldn't want them for themselves? Bishops can confidently expect that members' problems of sadness, loneliness, conflict, financial distress, and entrapment in sin that consume so much of their time will be alleviated as the Spirit borne from sharing the gospel comes into the hearts and homes of their ward members. There is no trade-off. To this I bear testimony.

We then set in motion four other practices that proved critical to our leadership of the ward's missionary effort. First, I decided that leading the missionary effort meant more than giving time in ward council and PEC for a report on investigators. I needed to be an exemplary member missionary. And in our council meetings I

needed to lead, rather than listen to, the discussions about missionary work. To do this I met with our missionaries every Saturday morning at 10:00 in our home. We spent this time reviewing each progressing investigator, so that I knew enough about them that I could lead the discussion about them in the next day's PEC or ward council meeting. I could think in advance about what assignments needed to be given to ward members who would be in a position to help these investigators progress. When I orchestrated the discussion in these meetings about our investigators and new members, the time spent became much more productive.

Second, we put in place our ward mission plan. As we had been trained, this plan was grounded upon goals for growing the ward through baptisms, reactivation and member referrals. We set a goal to baptize at least one person each month. Each priesthood quorum and auxiliary organization then contributed one or more "building blocks" to our plan. These were events or initiatives that each organization committed to undertake, in order to create opportunities for their members to invite others to learn of the gospel.

Third, a vital building block in our plan was teaching a three-session Sunday School class on how to share the gospel. By letter I invited about ten members at a time to attend this class, until all youth and adults had completed it. There they were taught about some of the erroneous concepts that members commonly follow that have made the work difficult, and were taught instead how to find and invite people to meet with the missionaries in ways that are natural and delightful. This was *very* valuable. I had previously not understood how much of members' reticence to share the gospel is grounded in the fact that they simply do not know how to do it.<sup>2</sup> In 2007 our ward members found more people for the missionaries to teach than any other ward in New England. The impact this had on the spirituality of our members was profound.

Fourth, as Ward Council members we re-framed our callings because it affects what we prioritize. Most of us frame our calling in terms of the program(s) for which we are responsible. If someone falls within the scope of my program, with this mindset, I am responsible for that person. If they don't, then I'm not. I realized that if I as bishop framed my calling as being responsible for the programs in my ward or for the *members* of my ward, there would be no one who felt responsible for the other 130,000 of God's children living within the boundaries of my ward who do not yet belong to his church. God does not limit his love and desire for eternal life to the subset of his children who actively attend his church. He feels the same love and concern for the eternal welfare of his children who appear on the missionaries' list of progressing investigators, as he feels for those of his children who are on the ward list. They are the same to God; and as a Ward Council we decided that they must be the same to us. As I led the discussion of our progressing investigators in each PEC and ward council meeting, therefore, we did not view these people as "outsiders" who might someday choose to become one of us. Rather than passively "monitor" which investigators progressed into the waters of baptism, our posture was to participate actively in that process, so that many more of those who began investigating the gospel would become truly converted converts. Their conversion was *our* business, not just the missionaries' business.

I assigned our ward mission leader to custom-tailor an ideal responsibility for each convert, and recommend it to me two weeks before baptism. I extended the call at the time of baptism so that each felt important and needed in the ward from the beginning. When possible we helped investigators prepare family names so that many members could visit the temple with our new converts soon after baptism, to help them do this work for their ancestors. And we made sure that each new member had already been visited by his home and visiting teachers before baptism. By seeking to fully integrate each progressing investigator into our ward before baptism, we met our goal of baptizing at least one new member each month. Our ward has been greatly blessed.

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<sup>2</sup> These lessons can be downloaded from [missionaryleaders.org](http://missionaryleaders.org) as well.