

Leading Missionary Work in the Stake and the Ward

This document, written primarily for bishops and stake presidents, is comprised of 3 three-page sections about leading missionary work. Because all must be exemplary leaders, the first summarizes how bishops and stake presidents can personally succeed in sharing the gospel.

The second recounts the work of a stake president who trained the leaders of each ward in his stake to develop and use powerful ward mission plans. It describes how he inspired them to do what they were trained to do, and then followed through with them to be sure they succeeded. Baptisms in his stake doubled – and many of those who were baptized came from member referrals.

The third section describes a bishop who decided to make missionary work the primary focus in his ward. It shows how he made the “leap of faith” that this focus would bring such spiritual blessings into the hearts and homes of the members of his ward that the other dimensions of the work of the ward would prosper as well. It describes how he led the missionary effort, and inspired members of his ward council to follow his lead. They achieved their goal of baptizing at least one new member every month.

Each of the accounts in this document is factual. Electronic copies of this can be obtained by writing to cmc@hbs.edu.

How to Be an Exemplary Member Missionary

Many of the most faithful members of the church follow misleading principles and practices when they attempt to share the gospel. They sift through the people they know, trying to judge which of them might be “prepared.” They then spend untold hours cultivating friendships with (known in LDS parlance as “working with”) those they have judged to be potentially interested, in the belief that they must “prepare” people before they can be invited. If and when they conclude that they are ready to be invited, their invitation typically focuses on how much the church can do for them – how much happier the church could help them become. The members then feel that they have failed if those they invite do not take the discussions and get baptized. These practices are actually grounded in unscriptural, false principles – but they have been so widely taught and practiced in the church that most members have become 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 each of us 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 in other ways. We indeed are busy. And yet if we are desperate to do what God has commanded, He will bless us with miracles. When He trusts that we'll invite them, God will put people in our paths. (1 Ne. 3:7)

6. Persistence. Many leaders and members give up after a few attempts, especially when initial experiences are negative. Our missionary efforts improve as we persist in applying correct principles. We need to have faith in the Lord, do the best that we can, and the Lord will accept our offerings and will magnify our efforts beyond our native abilities. Gradually, if we patiently

persist in humble missionary efforts, we will become instruments in the Lord's hands, and our weaknesses will become strengths.

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 sharing the gospel. 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," then many 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 do 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 have tried it because they haven't taken 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, it is then and only then that 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 come 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 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 we have the opportunity to invite, language like this has become easy and comfortable: “I’ve just had this feeling that I should ask you something, but before I do I want to be sure you feel free to say no to this invitation – because it won’t affect how I feel about you at all. But at some point, if you ever had the interest, I’d love to have you come to our home so we can explain a bit about what makes Mormons like me do what I do. It’s a great organization, and I just thought you might find it interesting.” This makes it easy for disinterested 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.

The vast majority of people outside the church do not know how to pray, or how to study the scriptures. Rather than simply teaching them what we think they should be interested in, we’ve found that our concern should first be to teach them how to study and find answers in the scriptures, and how to pray to know if something is true. In President Hinckley’s words, they then learn how to *nourish* themselves *by the good word of God*. To do this, we’ve learned to follow the same process with our investigators that *Preach My Gospel* (pp. 107-112) recommends for the missionaries when *they* study the gospel. The missionaries are taught to: 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, because it forces them to *think*; and 4) Pray to know if what they wrote, and what they read, are true. Before we started teaching our investigators to follow this process, 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 our invitation, we 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?” The missionaries then draw on the lessons in *Preach My Gospel* to answer their questions. After each lesson we give our friends a “homework” assignment, to read specific chapters in the Book of Mormon from which they can distill answers to two or three of 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 read their answers to their questions and explain how they derived those answers from the Book of Mormon. We then 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.

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

For a number of years the baptisms in one of the strongest stakes in the Northeast 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 a recent stake conference the visiting authorities challenged this stake to do better in its missionary activities. Two area seventies 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

The stake presidency invited the members of each ward council 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 one option that ward leaders might weigh as they contemplate carrying out the mandate God has given them to lead missionary work in their ward. 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. 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.¹
3. 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. Bishops were taught how to follow-up with council members individually and in ward council meetings, to monitor whether they met their monthly commitment in the ward mission plan.

¹ The training material, including sample building blocks and ward mission plans, can be found in the booklet, "Leading a Great Ward Mission." Printed copies can be obtained from cmc@hbs.edu. This booklet, the presentation used for this training, and additional ideas for building blocks can be found on the website missionaryleaders.org.

4. Several stake members bore witness that missionary success was possible by following these few simple steps. The stake president reviewed the extraordinary promises that God made in the Doctrine and Covenants to members who engage in missionary work (see p. 5), and testified of the blessings that this would bring into the lives of the members of the stake. He committed that he would have a family taught the gospel in his home by the end of the year.

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, the stake high councilor for missionary work followed through by doing the following five things:

1. Ensured that each ward mission leader understood 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. Where necessary, he made suggestions on how certain building blocks might be made more effective, based upon the training they had received.
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 goals in the 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, the stake president did the following:

1. He and his wife personally fulfilled their commitment to have families they had invited taught by the missionaries in their home.
2. One of the most important of the principles of member missionary work that was taught in their training meeting was that people living in comfortable circumstances often have a deeper need to give service than to receive help. The stake president frequently taught in stake meetings that the easiest way to invite friends to participate in our meetings is to ask them to serve with us in some way. He 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 transform activities they already were doing, into missionary opportunities.

3. In each PPI with bishops, he confirmed: 1) That the bishop was allowing time in each ward council to follow up with the ward organizations on their success with their piece of the plan; and 2) That the bishop was deeply committed to bringing the blessings of missionary work to his ward. “The bishops need both the *will* to keep missionary work a priority, and *skill* to implement and follow through,” he said.
4. Quarterly he reviewed each ward’s results against the ward mission plan, including new members baptized, increased sacrament meeting attendance and referrals to missionaries from members.
5. He met monthly with the zone leaders to ensure that he 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. He 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 Stake doubled from the prior year; and the stake moved from having the lowest baptisms per missionary companionship to among the highest in its mission. This process brought a number of strong families into the church that might not have been found by the missionaries. Friends of other faiths were enthused to serve side by side with stake members. This 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. And many more converts have become and remained strong, contributing members in their wards than historically was the case.

<p>The First Presidency announced in May, 2002 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 he was called in 2005, the bishop of a ward in New England decided that in order to give missionary work the priority this demanded on top of all his other responsibilities, he needed truly to believe that the energy he and his ward leaders devoted to leading the missionary effort would magnify, rather than diminish, the effectiveness of all else that they were trying to do.</p> <p>The bishop and a friend compiled a list of the promises God has made in the Doctrine and Covenants to those that engage in missionary work. These promises, some of which are summarized in the table below (with the section and verse), convinced him that if he as bishop could inspire the members of his ward to share the gospel and find people for the missionaries to teach, his members indeed would be richly blessed.</p>	
<p>Power and Strength as you Serve the Lord</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None shall stay you (1:5). • You will have the power of God unto the convincing of men (11:21). • The gates of hell shall not prevail against you (17:8). • You shall receive strength such as is not known among men (24:12). • I myself will go with you and be in your midst. Nothing shall prevail against you. (32:3). • Your mouth shall be filled and you shall become even as Nephi of old (33:8). • 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). • Power shall rest upon you. I will be with you, and go before your face (39:12). • Your enemies will not have power over you (44:5). • 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). 	<p>Personal Purity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You shall stand blameless before God (4:2). • Your sins will be forgiven (31:5; 36:1; 60:7; 62:3; 84:61). • You will be able to keep God's laws (44:5). • The Lord will make you holy (60:7). <p>Faith</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be given a testimony of the words of the prophets (21:9). • You shall have revelations (28:8). • You shall have great faith. (39:12). <p>Happiness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your joy shall be great (18:14-15). <p>Prosperity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You shall have blessings greater than the "treasures of earth" (19:37-38). • Your back shall be laden with sheaves (31:5; 33:9). • I will take care of your flocks (88:72). • 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). <p>Health</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord will stand by you (68:6). • No weapon formed against you shall prosper (71:9). • 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) • I will uphold you (93:51). • You shall have power to declare my word (99:2). • The Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record of all things, whatsoever ye shall say (100:8). • 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). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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) • A hair from your head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed (84:80, 116). <p>The Holy Spirit Will Be With You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will send upon you the Comforter, which shall teach you the truth and the way whither you shall go (79:2). • 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).
---	---

What bishop, he realized, 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? He saw that he confidently could expect that members' problems of sadness, loneliness, conflict, financial distress, and entrapment in sin that consumed so much of the typical bishop's time can be greatly alleviated as the Spirit borne from sharing the gospel comes into the hearts and homes of their ward members. He bore testimony of this to the members of his ward council: There is no trade-off.

With this conviction he then set in motion five other practices that proved critical to his leadership of the ward's missionary effort. First, he was inspired to call an exceptional man to serve as ward mission leader. Although this was someone who could have served in many key leadership positions, having a capable, committed, high-energy leader in this position was critical – because of the blessings that would accrue to the members of the ward from missionary success.

Second, after counseling with his counselors and the ward mission leader he decided that leading the missionary effort meant more than giving time in ward council and PEC for a report on investigators. In their council meetings the Bishop needed to lead, rather than listen to, the discussions about missionary work. To do this he met with the missionaries every Saturday morning at 10:00 in his home. They spent this time reviewing each progressing investigator, so that he knew enough to personally lead the discussion about them in the next day's PEC or Ward Council meeting. This helped him 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 it was he who orchestrated the discussion about investigators and new members in these meetings, the

time spent became much more productive. Because the ward council became involved early in the lives of investigators – soon after they appeared on the progressing investigator report – the new member retention rate in the ward rose significantly.

Third, they put in place their ward mission plan. As they had been trained, they set a goal to increase sacrament meeting attendance to a specific level. They targeted the number of people that they would find for the missionaries to teach; and they committed to baptize at least one person each month. Each priesthood quorum and auxiliary organization then contributed one or more “building blocks” to the 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.

Fourth, a vital building block in their plan was teaching a three-session Sunday School class on how to share the gospel. By letter the bishop 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,” the bishop reflected.² In 2007 his 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 his members was profound.

Fifth, the Ward Council members re-framed their callings, because it affected what they would prioritize. The bishop explained, “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 100,000 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, they already were our responsibility. Instead of passively monitoring 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, with the missionaries playing a key support role as set-apart teachers.”

With this framing of responsibility, the Ward Council strove to integrate each progressing investigator into their ward *before* baptism. The time before baptism was a critical period for the bishop and other ward leaders to get to know each investigator. The bishop assigned the ward

² These lessons can be downloaded from missionaryleaders.org as well.

mission leader to custom-tailor an ideal responsibility for each convert, and to recommend it to the bishop several weeks before baptism. He extended the call at the time of baptism so that each felt important and needed in the ward from the beginning. The Elders Quorum president met with each adult male investigator before baptism to plan his priesthood ordination on the Sunday following baptism, and to teach him about administering the sacrament. When possible the high priests helped investigators prepare family names so that many members could visit the temple with new converts soon after baptism, to help them do this work for their ancestors. And they made sure that each new member had been visited by his home and visiting teachers before baptism at least once. By seeking to fully integrate each progressing investigator into the ward before baptism, more of them remained active. These new members became, in turn, the best sources of referrals to the missionaries. The ward met its goal of baptizing at least one new member each month. The ward and its members were greatly blessed, as the Lord had promised.