

# North America West and Northwest Area Broadcast

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June 25, 2019

## ELDER KEVIN W. PEARSON—HOW WE CAN INCREASE CONVERT BAPTISMS AND RETENTION

Brother and sisters, on behalf of the Area Presidency, we extend a warm welcome to each of you joining this Area Presidency broadcast. We express our love and gratitude to you for your faithful and devoted service to the Lord and to His Church. We pray constantly for you and your families. Thank you for joining us this evening. We have asked Elder Scott D. Whiting, First Counselor in the Area Presidency, to offer an opening prayer.

Thank you, Elder Whiting.

As an Area Presidency, we are grateful for the way you have embraced the area plan introduced in October of 2018. We see evidence everywhere we go of your efforts to emphasize the area vision to “be a light unto the world by becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ and joyfully help others to follow the Savior and receive the blessings of the temple.” As we continue to teach with love the importance and joy of daily personal repentance in becoming true disciples and ministers, keeping sacred covenants and enjoying temple blessings, helping the Church grow, and encouraging the rising generation, individual faith will be strengthened and lives will be blessed. Your inspired leadership and service are making a significant difference!

We may not be able to control the economic and social factors that influence why members of the Church move into and out of our area, but we can exercise faith and the power of the priesthood in growing the Church wherever we are. As President Nelson has recently taught:

I promise you that if we will do our best to restore the correct name of the Lord’s Church, He whose Church this is will pour down His power and blessings upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints, the likes of which we have never seen. We will have the knowledge and power of God to help us take the blessings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Surely this includes the North America West and Northwest Areas, which as of August 1, 2019, will be known as North America West.

Tonight, we will discuss how we can access His great power to grow His Church. Each member of the Area Presidency will address a key topic central to this vision. Our messages have been formatted so that they can be used separately for additional training and discussion.

President Nelson has declared that the gathering of Israel is “*the greatest challenge, the greatest cause, and the greatest work on earth.*” To the youth of the Church he said:

You were sent to earth at this precise time, the most crucial time in the history of the world, to help gather Israel. There is *nothing* happening on this earth right now that is more important than that. There is *nothing* of greater consequence. Absolutely *nothing*.

This gathering should mean *everything* to you. This *is* the mission for which you were sent to earth.<sup>2</sup>

Those are bold and impressive statements. He has further stated: “Our message to the world is simple

and sincere: we invite all of God's children on both sides of the veil to come unto their Savior, receive the blessings of the holy temple, have enduring joy, and qualify for eternal life."<sup>3</sup> President Nelson has further emphasized that the gathering of Israel includes missionary work for the living, temple ordinances for the dead, and deepening conversion for the living. If this is the greatest work on the earth, how do you think we are doing in your stake, ward, or branch? Are we organized for success? Is the greatest work on earth getting our best efforts?

Recently, President Nelson declared:

Our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, will perform some of His mightiest works between now and when He comes again. We will see miraculous indications that God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, preside over this Church in majesty and glory. But in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.<sup>4</sup>

Brothers and sisters, we have been earnestly seeking that influence, guidance, and direction as we seek to grow and strengthen the Church. We pray that you will join us in pleading with the Lord to grow and strengthen the Church in your area.

We believe that there is more that we can and should be doing about the "greatest challenge, cause, and work on earth." We believe that the Lord will provide miraculous assistance in proportion to our faith and trust in Him and our willingness to follow correct principles and patterns in our stakes and wards. We have gathered to discuss how we are doing and to establish a vision, goals, plans, accountability, and urgency to improve. We invite you to discuss these same principles in your stakes, wards, and branches and to establish a vision, goals, plans, and accountability to truly make this the greatest work on earth!

Years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley prophetically declared, "I am not being unrealistic when I

say that with concerted effort, with recognition of the duty which falls upon each of us as members of the Church, and with sincere prayer to the Lord for help, we could double [convert baptisms]."<sup>5</sup> Do you believe that? We absolutely do.

Last October we asked full-time missionaries to dedicate the hours of 5:00–7:00 p.m. each day to finding more individuals, especially families, to teach. Missionaries should be constantly finding all day long. However, 5:00–7:00 p.m. is premium finding time because that is when most families are home. "Nothing happens in missionary work until you find someone to teach."<sup>6</sup> Since October, missionary finding efforts have increased in most areas by 39 percent. But finding scattered Israel is not the same as gathering Israel. Member finding efforts are significantly more effective than missionary finding. However, our missionaries simply must find, teach, and baptize more people if we are to grow the Church.

Most missionaries only teach one lesson a day. To become effective teachers, they need to teach 15–20 lessons each week. Therefore, we have asked missionaries to meet with members in their homes each night from 8:00–9:00 p.m. and teach them a lesson. By doing so, missionaries can double their teaching experience and end each day on a positive note by teaching, testifying, and using the power of the priesthood to bless those who have faith. This helps missionaries become better, and it allows members to see missionaries at their very best. We hope this will also encourage more members to be a light unto others and to simply invite them to come and see and to come and help. Thank you for the support you are giving this initiative. Improving finding and teaching is the first step in our efforts to grow the Church.

In April we met with the Area Seventy and with the mission presidents and their wives to discuss changing our approach to teaching, conversion, and retention and placing greater emphasis on member and leader involvement. This was the

second step in our efforts to grow the Church. Here are just a few key findings that suggest we have significant room for improvement:

- Over the past six years we have experienced a significant decline in convert baptisms in our area.
- The vast majority of all the wards and branches in the area had fewer than three convert baptisms last year.
- Missionaries receive fewer than one member referral per week.
- Missionaries are only teaching three investigators per week and do not involve members in their teaching.
- Teaching focuses more on lessons than on creating personal spiritual experiences and relationships with members.

Surely one does not need to look far to conclude that we can do much better. The fact is, missionary work is being done primarily by full-time missionaries without much member involvement. The keys for missionary work and for temple and family history work are held by stake presidents and bishops, not by the missionaries. This work must be led by stake presidents and bishops. It must involve the members of the wards through the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies.

Likewise, retention of new converts is the primary responsibility of the ward council under the keys of the bishop. However, retention begins long before baptism and must focus on the temple. Here are some additional key findings from the past two years:

- Many new converts do not receive the Aaronic Priesthood.
- Only a small fraction of eligible new converts receive limited-use temple recommends.
- Only a few new converts are submitting family names for temple ordinances.
- Fewer than 1 in 4 new converts have callings.

- Most eligible adult male converts do not receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.
- Only a small percentage of new converts are endowed.

If we keep doing what we have been doing, we will keep getting the same results. We need a new approach, one that combines the best efforts of missionaries and members under the priesthood keys of the stake presidents and bishops. Brethren, you are the key to success.

Let me suggest a different vision of the work.

Currently, the missionaries are finding, on their own, only 1–2 new people to teach each week. This graphic reflects the fact that the average time between teaching appointments with those investigators is 10 days, with little to no improvement by members. As a result, most investigators drop the missionaries after the first two lessons. Clearly, missionaries need to improve their teaching skills. But there is something even more obvious missing. Members. The involvement of members in the finding and teaching process completely changes the dynamics and the results! When members get involved and begin to invite those being taught to activities, to Church, and to their homes, conversion increases significantly. And so does retention.

So, while mission presidents and wives continue to work tirelessly on improving missionary skills, and missionaries seek to improve their teaching ability by teaching members in their homes each night, we need to rethink member involvement in the conversion process. Individuals need personal spiritual experiences with prayer, the Book of Mormon, sacrament meeting, family history, and relationships with members as much as they need missionary lessons. Lessons do not convert. Conversion comes through the power of the Spirit. It consists of personal spiritual experiences and the involvement and support of members.

Therefore, we are asking missionaries to change their approach to teaching in four significant ways:

1. Contact the ward mission leader within 48 hours of finding someone, and seek help to involve a member or family with similar interests who can interact with and mentor the individuals being taught. This requires a ward mission leader who has daily contact with the missionaries and frequent contact with the elders quorum and Relief Society.
2. Focus on facilitating personal spiritual experiences rather than just teaching lessons. These experiences will involve members, ward, and branch leaders early on and throughout the conversion process and will include family history work and self-reliance services.
3. Teach with a focus on the temple, including setting a second baptismal date to take the names of deceased family members to the temple.
4. Teach with love and with greater spiritual power and confidence.

The result will be deeper and more lasting conversion, greater member and leader involvement early on and throughout the conversion process, and a significant increase in the number of individuals and families joining and strengthening the Church.

Several years ago, my wife and I purchased our first home. After surviving the substantial remodeling needed, we decided to tackle the overgrown landscape. A family friend, who owned a local nursery, offered to design a new landscape plan and provide and install the plants at a significantly reduced cost. We were thrilled. He indicated we would need to install a new watering system and improve the plant beds. This was a huge job. At the completion of the project he said, “Kevin, I have personally selected and planted the very best materials. But you need to understand that when plants are transplanted into new soil, they need extra care and watering. The process is very traumatic and disruptive on the root system. They need extra water before and after being replanted or they simply won’t survive. If you don’t take good care of them, they will

not survive. It will be your fault if that happens, not mine. Don’t expect me to replace them. They simply need extra care and watering to adjust to the new soil they are planted in.”

Precious souls, like plants, are traumatized by the changes required in the process of conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They need greater care and watering than experienced Church members. They need a patient, loving gardener and friends who understand and care.

Brothers and sisters, this broadcast is the next step in our efforts to grow the Church—training and engaging priesthood and auxiliary leaders. We need a new vision, specific goals, detailed plans, personal accountability, and a greater sense of urgency for our roles in the gathering of Israel in each stake and ward. Will you join us in this extraordinary work? Will you prayerfully consider and discuss the principles and messages we present this evening in your presidencies, stake, and ward councils? I promise you that the Lord will direct and magnify your efforts to help grow His Church in powerful and miraculous ways. I testify that this is the work of Almighty God. This is the work for which we have been sent to earth at this time. He will miraculously multiply and magnify our efforts. By small and simple things, the Lord can and will bring to pass great things. But He requires our willing minds, hearts, and our best efforts. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

We will now view a short video presentation that portrays this new vision of missionaries and members working together under inspired priesthood leadership.

Elder Jörg Klebingat will then focus on specific ways members and missionaries can work together to make this new vision of the work a reality. He will be followed by Elder Scott D. Whiting, who will address organizing for success and the role leaders play. We will then hear from Elder Steven R. Bangerter, who will discuss the Spanish outreach initiative.

## Elder Jörg Klebingat—Members and Missionaries

Dear brothers and sisters, dear missionaries, we hope that you enjoyed this video presentation. We of course recognize that it portrays an ideal “pie in the sky” scenario where everything aligns just perfectly for a wonderful outcome. This is intentional. Doesn’t portraying the ideal help us wish and strive for the best? Doesn’t it help us raise our own personal standards? Should we not aim high and strive for excellence in this all-important endeavor of saving souls?

Our prophet’s reminder that “this gathering should mean *everything* to [us]”<sup>7</sup> can seem quite daunting since *none* of us are currently fully living up to that expectation, speaker included. Isn’t it comforting to know that a realistic, loving, and patient Heavenly Father will be pleased if you and I are only willing to make the gathering at least a little *more* important to us than it currently is? Where you and I currently are on that spectrum of faith and consecration is not important. Whether we can love Him *and* our neighbors sufficiently to move beyond our current status quo is the real question. Therefore, before discussing how you members and you missionaries might work together more effectively to gather Israel, I first invite each of you individually to evaluate your personal readiness and willingness to let your light shine amongst your friends and neighbors.

Our Heavenly Father knows, of course, that when it comes to the gathering, each of us can do *something*. I also believe that He is generally disinterested in all the things we think we *can’t* do to help grow the Church. He stands ever ready to “prepare a way for [us] that [we] may accomplish the thing which He commandeth [us].”<sup>8</sup> But since not even the Lord can steer a parked car, our first privilege and duty is to ask, with the Lord’s help, for a particle of faith and a desire to stand as witnesses of Him and His name and to put our

shoulders to the wheel even in the smallest ways, especially if we think that we have very little to offer in terms of sharing the gospel with others. I testify that Heavenly Father loves to magnify, line upon line and precept upon precept, even our smallest and simplest efforts. He rejoices especially when those of us who falsely assume that we really have not much to contribute offer up something, even something small!

So what can you members and leaders expect of the Lord’s missionaries who are serving in your wards and stakes? You can expect:

- That they will conduct themselves as true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ at all times, both in dress and behavior.
- That they have as their first priority the finding and teaching and baptizing of converts.
- That they will be diligently involved in their own finding efforts all day every day by talking to everyone and by employing righteous means to find new people to teach wherever they go.
- That they will strive for consecrated obedience by faithfully and joyfully keeping all the mission rules and commandments.
- That they will strive to love and serve you.
- That they will never just hang out at your house without fulfilling their missionary purpose.
- That they will become powerful and confident teachers of the gospel through daily study and practice.

Should they sometimes fall short, let us remember our own missions—that should do it!

Dear members and leaders, please do all in your power to help our missionaries rise to the highest levels of consecrated obedience and performance by loving them, by helping them, by occasionally inviting them into your homes, and by correcting them when necessary. Stake presidents, bishops, and Relief Society presidents, please let your

missionaries know what *you* expect of them in terms of how *they* can help *you* accomplish this great work of the gathering in your personal lives and in your wards and stake. Stake presidents, please make your mission president your best friend and partner by joining your sacred keys with his in order for the Church to grow in your area in a Spirit of unity and mutual cooperation.

Now on to you dear missionaries. What should you expect of the members and leaders in the wards and stakes where you serve?

For one, I hope that the members and leaders among whom you labor, especially those who once served as missionaries throughout the world, will remember the prayers *they* used to offer on behalf of the members of their wards and stakes. Prayers such as, “Lord, please soften the hearts of our members toward us and toward their friends and neighbors. Please help them to not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ but to share it freely in natural and normal ways. Please prompt them to open their homes to us occasionally so that we may become a blessing in their lives and improve our teaching skills.”

Dear missionaries, both elders and sisters, we hope that the stake presidents where you are serving are anxious to meet with you for a few minutes a couple of times a month to thank you for your service and to coordinate the work. We hope that the bishops, elders quorum presidents, and Relief Society presidents in your wards reach out to you regularly for the same reason. We hope that your ward mission leaders are as anxious to be in almost daily contact with you as your ward family history advisers are to help your investigators discover their roots.

We hope that these wonderful leaders with whom you labor recognize that only the coordination of “missionary work” may be delegated, not missionary work itself. We hope that you will find them each diligently engaged in natural and normal ways to share the gospel.

That they, along with all members of the ward council—indeed, along with all members of your wards and branches—pray daily for the Church to grow, along with a prayer to find out what they personally can do to help. We hope that they look forward to greeting and showing interest in every new person you bring to Church on Sundays. After all, *Preach My Gospel* teaches you to “introduce people you are teaching to the bishop, his counselors, elders quorum and Relief Society presidents, and other ward leaders as soon as possible.”<sup>9</sup> On that note, we hope that your leaders are the kind that want to be introduced *to*.

We also hope that they will, on occasion, open their homes for you to teach a lesson or, better yet, for you to bring someone to be taught in their home or in their presence at Church. We hope that you will find members willing to spend a few minutes here and there to read from the Book of Mormon with you and your investigators. We hope that no one you bring to church will ever sit alone or leave without having felt the Savior’s love through the members.

Dear leaders, dear members, dear missionaries, we each share the privilege of helping those around us discover what we already know: that God is our loving Heavenly Father, that Christ lives and atoned for our sins, that we have a living prophet in President Russell M. Nelson, that the true Church of Jesus Christ has been restored, and that *time is running out*.

On behalf, and for the sake of, our brothers and sisters who have not yet had the chance to come and see, come and help, and come and stay, we plead with you to close your ranks and to work together in ways previously unheard of. Please treat each new person, whether they were found by you or by the missionaries, as a precious son or daughter of God, and then contribute what you can—even something small, whether you are called or assigned to do so or not—to helping them progress toward baptism and the temple.

Work together from the earliest moment of a person's exposure to this wonderful gospel to set high expectations regarding how frequently they will be in your presence, either to be taught or otherwise fellowshiped. If at all possible, don't let 48 hours pass without sending these precious souls a signal that in *this church*, we treat everyone as the Savior would, that we welcome those looking for the truth. Together—and by together I mean leaders, members, and missionaries acting as one—focus on creating spiritual experiences for these sons and daughters of God as opposed to just thinking in terms of teaching them the lessons. Let us not ever look upon them as mere projects or burdensome, time- and energy-draining outsiders, but as our actual and literal brothers and sisters who need our love and protection from the storms of life.

Some have suggested that missionary work “is difficult,” and maybe there is some truth to that. Others have raised voices of caution at overburdening our members. But let us not spend time worrying about things we seemingly cannot do by focusing instead on what all of us *can* do.

For example, spending a few minutes here and there being loving, being kind, being courteous, being interested, being helpful, and, therefore, being more like the Savior is not a burden but the daily bread of covenant keepers. Is it too much to ask that we pray each day for the Church to grow, both privately and in our Church meetings? Is it burdensome to make a point each Sunday to proactively say hello to those who seem to be visiting for the first or even the second time? Or is it a sacrifice to invite them to sit with us? Or to send them an encouraging text message every now and then? Or to give them a brief call?

To those of us who love the Book of Mormon and our fellow man, is it too much to ask to occasionally spend a few minutes before or after church reading from the Book of Mormon with those being taught and the missionaries? And if we are going

to have a barbeque, a home evening, a service project, or a family history activity anyway, is it too much to occasionally think of those who might benefit from being loved and ministered to by us in these natural and normal ways? Can our youth not invite a friend to seminary? Or our young single adults invite their peers to an institute class or activity? Can you and I not help someone discover their first four generations, both prior to and following baptism? Can each of us not do *something*? Even something small?

You and I should first reflect on these and similar questions as they relate to our own individual lives. What can *you* and I do to be that kind of a Saint to others? And once we have made up our own minds, once we have made our own decisions, then, and only then, we invite you to discuss regularly in your ward and stake councils ways you can be even more welcoming and supportive of those whom the missionaries are teaching. As an Area Presidency, when we think “pie in the sky,” we dream of councils at all levels addressing these issues with joyful frequency!

Brothers and sisters, we remember President Thomas S. Monson's invitation that “now is the time for members and missionaries to come together, to work together, to labor in the Lord's vineyard to bring souls unto Him.”<sup>10</sup> *Now* means just that. Now means now, today, not tomorrow or someday when it is convenient.

After teaching that every convert needs a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with “the good word of God,”<sup>11</sup> President Gordon B. Hinckley said that “it is our *duty* and *opportunity* to provide these things” and that “this is a work for everyone.”<sup>12</sup>

Given the condition and temptations of an evil world, the road from first contact with the gospel to the temple is a long, treacherous road for our brothers and sisters. Completing this journey successfully requires the loving and protective care of

many imperfect shepherds and ministers like you and me. It is my prayer that each of us will allow the Lord to make our own burdens lighter by extending our hand of Christlike fellowship to those not of our faith. Let us turn a new leaf and work together like never before as members and missionaries to bring souls unto Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Whiting will now help us better understand how to organize for success.

### **Elder Scott D. Whiting—Organize for Success**

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in this broadcast with you, the critical leaders in the ward and stake organization.

Now is the time for us to do our part in this, as President Nelson taught and as you have heard again today, "*the greatest challenge, the greatest cause, and the greatest work on earth,*" the gathering of scattered Israel. If, as declared by President Nelson, "there is *nothing* happening on this earth right now that is more important than that. There is *nothing* of greater consequence. Absolutely nothing," then truly, this "should mean *everything* to [us]."<sup>13</sup>

Let's make this real for a moment. As a leader in the kingdom of God on earth, does the gathering of Israel mean everything to you? Do your efforts as individuals and as leaders reflect the level of urgency commensurate with the significance of this "greatest cause"? Sobering question, to be sure. Perhaps, in part, a prophet focused his most recent message in general conference on repentance because he knows the answer to that question. So let's repent, or change, and organize the stake, ward, quorums, and auxiliaries for success in this effort. It is time to do things differently—it is time to elevate our efforts.

Stake presidents and bishops hold the keys for this great work. We cannot work around those keys, but we must organize and work through the authorizing and enabling power of those keys. It is those keys, not those held by a mission president, that must drive this work. The missionaries are here to assist us, not lead us in this effort. A stake president should never ask a mission president what his vision is for the work, but rather the mission president should ask the stake president what *his* vision is for the work. This may be a paradigm shift, but it is in complete alignment with the keys to accomplishing this work.

Stake presidents and bishops set goals and plans for the gathering of scattered Israel within their units. These goals and plans should be made in the stake and ward councils where all can contribute and where all can have ownership of the proposed course. With any effective goal or plan there also needs to be a healthy component of accountability coupled with the vision and direction. Without accountability, progress will stall, discouragement will set in, and past—ineffective—patterns will be reverted to like water running down a deeply rutted hillside. Returning to these well-worn, and ineffective, ruts or patterns is exactly where the adversary wants us to settle.

Now, in order to assist in moving this great work forward, we introduce a simple ministering plan that, among other areas of emphasis, provides a section for goals to be recorded that are specific to growing the Church, or gathering on this side of the veil. We ask stake presidents and bishops to use this form to develop a ministering plan with the help of their stake and ward councils. We want you to populate this form with specific written goals for each area of emphasis. Stakes will then be asked to submit their completed plan to their Area Seventy. Likewise, stake presidents should have copies of the developed plans for their wards and branches as well.

This plan is a tool intended to help establish your vision, set expectations, provide for accountability, and unify your units in a common effort and approach to move this work forward. Again, please be specific in your plan. This plan, combined with the developed ward mission plan, should help you as the leaders of the Church to make greater progress in gathering scattered Israel. You will also note that there is space dedicated in this simple ministering plan for the other elements and focus of the area plan.

Now, this leader-directed effort to gather Israel is not new. *Handbook 2*, section 5, entitled “The Work of Salvation in the Ward and Stake,” reads as follows:

The bishop and his counselors give priority to member missionary work. They teach the doctrines of missionary work regularly. They encourage ward members to work with full-time missionaries to find, teach, and baptize investigators. They set an example by finding and preparing individuals and families for the missionaries to teach.<sup>14</sup>

The same duties are listed for the stake president and his counselors.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, in *Preach My Gospel* chapter 13 we are given the following direction:

The stake president oversees bishops in their missionary, retention, and activation responsibilities. In his monthly interview with the bishops, he discusses plans and the progress of members and those being taught by missionaries.

And to bishops, it instructs:

The bishop is responsible for missionary, retention, and activation efforts in the ward. His personal participation and leadership are essential. ...

The bishop uses the ward council to coordinate missionary, retention, and activation efforts. He

gives direction to developing and carrying out a ward mission plan.<sup>16</sup>

The ministering plan combined with the New and Returning Member form and the Progress Record developed by the missionaries will assist in these monthly accountability interviews. A well-prepared bishop combined with an interested and engaged stake president will bring greater power to these monthly interviews and will help to focus the leaders’ defined and expected efforts. Clearly, the stake presidents and bishops have a vital role in the success of this, the greatest work on the earth today.

Now, a word of clarification regarding direction earlier received on how we are to organize at the ward and branch level to facilitate the gathering in our units. Recognizing that the Church is a vast worldwide organization covering many cultures, demographics, and geography, a letter from the First Presidency dated October 6, 2018, was issued, providing guidance on the use and calling of a ward mission leader and counselors in the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies. The language, used purposefully, allowed for flexibility in organization. However, as the Area Presidency of the North America West Area, we have observed that success in this work is greatly enhanced when a committed and engaged ward mission leader is called. Therefore, we hope that with very few exceptions, each ward or branch in the area would have an independent ward mission leader who works closely with both the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies of each unit.

The ward mission leader will function as outlined in *Handbook 2*, chapter 5 with the addition of counseling closely with the counselors in the elders quorum and Relief Society presidencies who have been given charge over missionary work in their organizations. The ward mission leader will work closely with the designated elders quorum and Relief Society counselors and full-time missionaries in coordinating the gathering through missionary

work. This will allow for greater coordination and correlation by the full-time missionaries. We are asking that the full-time missionaries make daily contact with their ward or branch mission leader. This can be done in a phone call, text message, email, or an occasional personal visit. In these daily communications the missionaries will update the mission leader on their work that day and seek his help in organizing and arranging for the members to provide necessary help in ministering to those found and being taught by the missionaries. In the video shown to you earlier, you saw the ward kick into action to minister to a man found by the missionaries. Clearly, that did not and will not magically happen unless we are organized for this to happen. As you will see in a moment, this daily coordination is a critical, correlating component in increasing our success in this greatest work.

With the ward mission leader's coordinating efforts, the members need to be engaged with the help of the elders quorum and Relief Society. This is where the work will be done. This is why there is now a counselor in each organization so charged with these duties—to assist in the coordination and execution of the work.

Members are the key to conversion and retention; this process starts early on. Missionaries are encouraged, may I even say urged, to connect those whom they find and teach with members within 48 hours. Studies have shown that the sooner we connect these individuals and families with members of the Church, the greater the likelihood that they will progress and join the Church. In a moment, we will show you a companion video to the one showed earlier where the missionaries relied upon the members to minister to a man they found through their own efforts. This video will show how the members, through their leaders, were organized to assist in the gathering. Please note, however, that while this assistance will accelerate the pace of the gathering, we also need to continue to

encourage the members to introduce their friends, family, and acquaintances to the missionaries. The combination of this assistance with increasing member referrals will truly accelerate the pace of the gathering.

We know that everyone can do something to accelerate the work. Everyone can invite in normal and natural ways to simply come and see and come and help. Everyone can respond to the invitation to assist the missionaries as they teach those whom they find. Now is the time to rise up, now is the time to respond to the clarion call of a prophet of God, now is the time to elevate our efforts in this greatest cause of the earth today. Of these things I bear witness and testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Now please enjoy and learn from the companion video presentation. After you have watched the video you may want to ask, "What more can we do to organize our ward or stake to elevate and improve our engagement in this, the 'greatest cause' on earth today?"

### **Elder Steven R. Bangerter—Hispanic Outreach**

Brothers and sisters, I am so very grateful for Elder Pearson's request that I address you this evening. I have witnessed firsthand the inspired leadership of this Area Presidency as I have seen the Lord inspire them to accelerate the gathering of Israel in the North America West and Northwest Areas.

The fastest growing demographic in the North America West and Northwest Areas is that of Hispanic households. The same principles discussed by Elder Pearson, Elder Whiting, and Elder Klebingat for growing the Church apply to the great work we must now accomplish among the Hispanic population in the West and Northwest Areas. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve feel strongly that we need to increase our

efforts to strengthen our Hispanic members and to reach out to those of Hispanic descent not yet of our faith.

Following their conversion to the gospel, the sons of Mosiah yearned to share the gospel with the Lamanites. Their yearning was described this way: "They were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish."<sup>17</sup> In that same spirit and desire for all people to enjoy the blessings we have as members of the Lord's Church, my message this evening presents an area-wide plan to gather in our Hispanic brothers and sisters, that is, to strengthen membership, develop leaders, reactivate less-active members, and grow the Church among the Hispanic population.

During His mortal ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ established His Church among the believers in a simple way. He had his Apostles organize small groups of members with a presiding priesthood leader to minister to them. The early Church members were able to grow and prosper in the gospel because Christ and his Apostles:

- Kept the focus on teaching the principles and doctrines of the gospel.
- Encouraged members to receive the ordinances and to make and keep related covenants.
- Taught members to minister to one another's spiritual and temporal needs.
- Kept the organization simple.

According to the *Basic Unit Program Guidebook*:

"As authorized by the Area Presidency, the Basic Unit Program may be used for establishing and organizing the Church [through the establishment of groups or branches] in areas of the world where:

1. The Church is in its beginning stages.
2. Members are scattered.

3. The number of members is small and leadership is just beginning to develop. ...
4. Members have special language needs or other special needs."<sup>18</sup>

Guidelines for implementation of this plan have been provided to your Area Seventy and will be provided by them to all stake presidents. The purpose of this plan is to more productively direct our efforts to enable the gospel to be brought to those who are otherwise unable to travel to our traditional meetinghouses. This will be accomplished by creating small groups and branches among Hispanic populations who are otherwise unable to travel to meetinghouse locations.

The process for this plan will move forward as follows:

Under direction of the keys held by the stake president, each stake will soon form a Hispanic outreach group on the stake level consisting of:

- A member of the stake presidency.
- A member of the high council.
- A member of the stake Relief Society presidency.
- A counselor from each bishopric and branch presidency.
- A member of the mission presidency may also be included as an additional resource.

Other stake members may be assigned to assist at the discretion of the stake president. Where there is an overlay Spanish stake, a member of that stake presidency should be included in the stake outreach group.

The stake president will counsel with the mission president regarding implementation of this outreach effort. In order to accomplish the heightened demand this outreach may impose on the mission, the mission president may request an increase in his Spanish-speaking missionary complement with an emphasis on native speakers. The mission president will coordinate with the stake president

regarding when and where missionaries will be needed. Added attention should be given by the mission to accelerate the mission's efforts in finding, teaching, and baptizing Hispanic converts.

The stake outreach group will meet to determine the following:

- The location of Hispanic members both active and less-active living in the stake boundaries
- The proximity of these members to their current meetinghouses
- The best location to enable these members to meet and participate in worship and fellowship

In determining a local gathering place for these Hispanic members, consideration should include:

- Availability of public transportation.
- Pedestrian access.
- Density in the population of existing members.

In the process of determining meetinghouse locations, local leaders should not establish predetermined distances or travel times as the benchmark for whether a group or branch should be created. Rather, the stake outreach group should prayerfully consider the ability of the Hispanic population to travel from the location of their residence to a convenient gathering place for worship and fellowship.

Brothers and sisters, we are looking for a change of heart, a change in our approach to bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God's children. This plan is an effort to attract and reach all who are active, less-active, and those who are not of our faith.

The Hispanic outreach plan does not envision immediate new construction of Church buildings. Rather, meetinghouse locations may include:

- Existing storefront property.
- Public schools or community centers.
- Members' homes.
- Other suitable locations.

When leased space is being considered, the Area Seventy should contact the area planning manager, who will work with Church Real Estate to identify appropriate lease options.<sup>19</sup>

In process of implementation, the stake outreach group will determine whether a new unit should be a group or branch.

Groups may be organized with Area Presidency approval. Groups require very few members. They have a group leader and are attached to an existing ward, with a bishop as the key holder.

Branches require 20 members with at least four full-tithe payers and a worthy Melchizedek Priesthood holder who could serve as branch president and as the key holder. New branches require approval by both the Area Presidency and the Boundary and Leadership Change Committee.

Once the stake outreach group has determined where and what type of unit to create, the stake president should counsel with the Area Seventy before submission of the proposal to the Area Presidency and Boundary and Leadership Change Committee for approval.

"Gospel instruction in the home and in Church meetings is essential for spiritual growth and for strengthening personal testimony."<sup>20</sup> Leaders of newly formed groups and branches should carefully balance available Church resources with members' needs. Leaders will counsel together regarding how best to implement Church curriculum and the group or branch Sunday meeting schedule to meet the standards set forth in the *Basic Unit Program Guidebook*.

Once creation of a new unit is recommended, the stake outreach group should identify a Spanish-speaking couple (or couples) within the stake who is mature in the gospel and who may be called to serve in the new unit to provide strength and stability. Optimally, this would be a couple without dependent children living at home who can

dedicate their time on Sundays and other week-nights to supporting and strengthening members of the group or branch. It is not expected that this couple would be called into leadership positions but rather help in other ways to establish and strengthen the unit.

Once the location and size of the unit is determined and necessary approvals are received to create the unit, the stake council should work with the ward council of the host ward (if a group is created) to minister to and nurture Hispanic members with the hope that the unit will grow from a group to a branch and from a branch to a ward. The new unit(s) and Hispanic outreach effort should be a regular agenda item for the stake and ward council.

Concurrent with efforts by the stake to establish new units, stake and ward leaders should make concerted efforts to call Hispanic members to leadership positions within the stake and ward so that new leaders can be developed. Stake and ward leaders should guard against any action that may be considered as diminishing the importance of these members in the eyes of the Church. Every effort should be made to elevate and integrate Hispanic members among the fellowship of the Saints.

Each stake will report their progress on this outreach effort to their respective Area Seventy by June 30, 2019. Additional periodic updates on progress will be requested thereafter.

In light of this concerted effort, applications to discontinue or consolidate current Spanish-speaking wards and branches are discouraged. If there are compelling reasons for submitting such an application, stake presidents are asked to counsel with their Area Seventy, who will then counsel with the Area Presidency, before submitting the application for Quorum of the Twelve consideration.

Brothers and sisters, as inspiration of the Holy Ghost is sought, leaders will be guided to increase their efforts to strengthen our Hispanic members and to reach out to those of Hispanic descent not

yet of our faith. How blessed we are to be led in this great work by living apostles and prophets under the direction of our Lord and Savior whose Church this is. We pray that you will feel the Lord's guiding hand upon you as together we move forward in this great work.

### **Elder Kevin W. Pearson—Closing Remarks**

Thank you, brethren, for your wonderful presentations. Brothers and sisters, we have done our best to help you see a new vision of what is possible as we work together under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We hope you will now prayerfully consider and discuss what has been taught tonight in your respective stakes, wards, and branches. The materials presented this evening are available for you to download and use in your local units. We know you can and will receive personal revelation and divine assistance as you prayerfully seek the Lord's help to grow and strengthen the Church in your stakes and wards. I want to emphasize once more the critical need for stake presidents and bishops to lead out. Your inspired, personal leadership is essential to success. It cannot be done without you directing the work. This needs your faith, your vision, and your willingness to set goals, establish plans, and require accountability. You get what you focus on consistently. This sacred work is worthy of our focus. This is the work of Almighty God. It is a miraculous and marvelous work and a wonder. Becoming true disciples and ministers—lights unto the world—is how Heavenly Father plans to save us and our families as well as His beloved children. May we leave you with a quote from Elder Jeffrey R. Holland from a mission president seminar several years ago. It captures the urgency we feel for this great work.

Brethren and sisters, the spirit of the work is urgency, and we must imbue our missionaries and members with the spirit of now. N-O-W!

We are not just waiting for natural slow growth. We must move more rapidly. We must take things up a notch. If we have to call down miracles or angels, then call them down. The drama is unfolding, and we must do whatever it takes to ratchet up the work. ... I feel an incredible burden of urgency. I feel such a sense of urgency in my chest, I can hardly breathe. ... Every dispensation begins with a vision. We must have a vision. We must believe and build on what our forefathers have done. We are just going to putter along, be average—until we wind up to the level when our heart is up in our throat. And if we opened our eyes, we would expect to see angels. ... If this is God's work, and if He still lives, then the miracles and angels are still there. ...

We must live up to our potential. God will bless us with whatever we need. God wants us to just see what He sees and know what He knows. He wants us to ratchet up the vision. God is easy to please and hard to satisfy. ... This is not convenient, easy work. We have got to take things to the edge. We have to move into the realm of the miraculous. ... We have to live in such a way that we cannot do it alone anymore—where we will resort to the Lord—where we will cry, "Without thy help, I will fall. Help me fly." Go to the edge where miracles happen. Move into the realm of the miraculous. Welcome to the apostolic work.<sup>21</sup>

May each of us see the vision and exercise the faith to see the miraculous hand of the Lord in this, "the greatest work on the earth today." In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "The Correct Name of the Church," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 89.
- <sup>2</sup> Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel" (worldwide devotional for youth, June 3, 2018), supplement to the *Ensign*, Aug. 2018, 3, 12; supplement to the *Liahona*, Sept. 2018, 3, 12.
- <sup>3</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "Let Us All Press On," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 118–19.
- <sup>4</sup> Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 96.
- <sup>5</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 105.
- <sup>6</sup> *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2018), 161.
- <sup>7</sup> Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel," 12.
- <sup>8</sup> 1 Nephi 3:7.
- <sup>9</sup> *Preach My Gospel*, 218.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas S. Monson, "Welcome to Conference," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2013, 4.
- <sup>11</sup> Moroni 6:4.
- <sup>12</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, "Converts and Young Men," *Ensign*, May 1997, 47–48; emphasis added.
- <sup>13</sup> Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, "Hope of Israel," 3, 12.
- <sup>14</sup> *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 5.1.1.
- <sup>15</sup> *Handbook 2*, 5.1.9.1.
- <sup>16</sup> *Preach My Gospel*, 220.
- <sup>17</sup> Mosiah 28:3.
- <sup>18</sup> [Basic Unit Program Guidebook](#) (2002), 2.
- <sup>19</sup> See *Principles and Guidelines for Providing Meetinghouses: Area and Stake Presidencies* (June 1, 2015).
- <sup>20</sup> *Basic Unit Program Guidebook*, 6.
- <sup>21</sup> From Jeffrey R. Holland, address given at seminar for new mission presidents, Paris, France, 1995.



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