

to remind you of the importance of today. This is the time in which the work of this life is to be done. Be a participant. See that things happen. Make commitments to yourself and the Lord. Live outside yourself with love. A Hindu proverb says, "Help thy brother's boat across, and lo, thine own has reached the shore."

### Sacred responsibilities of parents

Now I speak to you who are parents. I was reminded of a cartoon LaRue Longden, former counselor in the YWMA, would often share in her talks. It shows the early morning hours with a couple out camping. The husband is fishing with a big smile on his face. The wife puts her sleepy head out of the tent — her hair going in all directions, the mosquitoes buzzing around her face, her eyes barely open — and comments to her husband, "Tell me again, dear, how much fun I am having." As a parent, do you need to remind yourself occasionally of how much fun you are having? Be sure and enjoy being a parent. It is a wonderful and sacred responsibility.

Three thoughts I would share:

First, take time for your children. As Elder Evans counseled: "Children are shaped and molded at a very early age. . . . Life goes quickly. Don't brush them off and turn them over to others. Take time for your children — before they're grown, before they're gone" (*Thoughts for One Hundred*

*Days: Volume Four* [Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1970], pp. 34–35).

Second, live within your income. Be frugal and wise. Pay your obligations to the Lord, your country, and yourself, and then live on what is left. It takes willpower to say no when you can't afford it, but you will sleep better at night.

Third, remember constant courtship. The most important relationship upon this earth for you is between you and your sweetheart. Work at it, sacrifice for it, enjoy it. You can make your home a bit of heaven as you build for an eternity together.

### The need for older members to serve

Now to those in your mature years. "Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men" (2 Nephi 31:20). Continue to be living testimonies of the gospel as you share your faith, love, and wisdom. You are sorely needed in the mission field. What lives you will bless as you accept the call to serve! There is so much for you to do in the holy temples. Don't retire from active service in the Lord's kingdom. You are needed!

I bear my testimony that God lives, that Jesus is the Savior, and that the gospel is for every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Gardner H. Russell

I think it's wonderful to have a calm exterior; I didn't know my heart could beat quite this hard. I am thrilled to be a member of the Mexico and Central America Area Presidency. You've heard from all three of us today: Elder Gene R. Cook in the prayer, Elder H. Verlan Andersen, and myself.

Now, it is with humility that I stand before you as one of the Lord's

servants with a prayer in my heart that someone, somewhere, will be touched by the Spirit of the Lord which, hopefully, will speak through me, and his or her heart and life will be changed.

### Father's blessings

What a wonderful experience of love came to me just a few weeks ago

when, at my request, my ninety-one-year-old father, Dr. Harry James Russell, gave me a father's blessing as I prepared to leave for my assignment as Second Counselor in the Mexico and Central America Area.

Fathers everywhere, consider the gift of love you can give your children when you are worthy and you lay your hands upon their heads to pronounce inspired father's blessings as the family patriarch. They will feel a continuing outpouring of your love, which will keep them close to you and to the Lord. You will not have to "seek them out" later.

### Invitation to less-active members

How impressed we were by the caring and outpouring of love evident in last December's message from the First Presidency. This inspired invitation to return has reached tens of thousands of the Lord's people. It is far more than a Christmas message; it is a clarion call for all to return to the Lord's church (see *Ensign*, Mar. 1986, p. 88).

Then, in last April general conference, that wonderful message in a spirit of deep love, "Please come back!" rings in our ears and has reached many hearts (see Conference Report, Apr. 1986, p. 13; or *Ensign*, May 1986, p. 10).

### Responsibilities to less-active members

The Lord requires us — yes, you and me — to locate the less-active members and help them to return to the fold.

"For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out" (Ezekiel 34:11).

Yes, we are to both "search my sheep" (locate them) and then "seek out" (bring back) less-active members and families, with unending and unqualified love.

And in the process, we and they shall learn the true meaning of "ye

shall . . . find me, when ye shall search for me" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Servants of the Lord prepare in humility, through study of the Book of Mormon, prayer, and calling on the Lord, to actually depend on the Lord so that the Spirit of the Lord is in them.

The servants of the Lord then visit the less-active families and assure them of the redeeming love of the Lord and their love for them. They speak not only by inspiration, but by a higher law, in which the Spirit of the Lord speaks through them. Through constant prayer in the heart, what is said is by the Spirit of the Lord.

The family remembers that the Lord truly loves them and finds that the servants of the Lord love them as well. Then the Lord returns the family to the fold.

### Experiences with less-active members in Central America

In my training as a new General Authority, I found myself in Costa Rica with Elder F. Arthur Kay and others. In prayer and fasting, we visited families who were less active. The stake president and bishops had fasted and prayed that the Lord would indicate to them the choice families to be visited, and the families were then notified of the planned visits.

We first entered the home of a young, successful businessman with a lovely wife and children. A former leader, he had transgressed the laws of the Church. As the Spirit of the Lord spoke through his servants, tears came to all our eyes as the couple committed to prepare to go to the Lord's house, the beautiful new temple in Guatemala, to be sealed for eternity.

Just two weeks ago, in Guadalupe, Mexico, at a stake conference, I visited three families who will be among my lifelong friends. Miracles occurred in all their lives. In one visit, a nonmember father, who has been donating an amount equal to a full tithing and who supports his wife and seven sons in the Church, was asked as patri-

arch to select someone to lead us in kneeling prayer. He looked past the General Authority, past the stake president and the bishop, and with love in his eyes asked his wife to give the prayer. What a golden moment! What a tribute to her love and patience.

This same man was unable to sleep that night, and the following morning, in a meeting with recent converts and newly returned members, gave a loving, beautiful testimony of the gospel and pledged to be baptized in another eight days.

### **Blessings of searching out and helping less-active members**

It is exciting to see the servants of the Lord, the leaders and members, prepare as vessels of the Spirit of God to identify the families who have been distracted or have transgressed and are now less active and then to touch the hearts of these wonderful families. Yes, thousands of families are returning to the Lord. They have received in love the invitation to return, have understood the humble, loving plea, "Please come back!" They have been searched out by servants of the Lord, then have been sought out by the Spirit of the Lord and brought back as they have remembered once again the word spoken through the Lord's servants.

In these inspired visits, I do not know of a single instance where hearts of families have not been touched by the miracle of our Lord's unconditional love and his servants' caring and love.

May we assure our sometimes missing friends in the Church of our Lord's love for them and ask the Spirit of the Lord to testify through us to them of the Lord's love for them, and our love as well, and bring them back to the fold in joy.

I bear my humble witness that our leaders are inspired and receive revelation for us, that the Book of Mormon nurtures the true fountain of Christ's Spirit, and that this is the true, restored church of Jesus Christ on the earth. And I do this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### **President Monson**

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Joseph Smith's First Prayer," following which Elder Ted E. Brewerton of the First Quorum of the Seventy will address us.

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The choir and congregation sang "Joseph Smith's First Prayer."

Elder Ted E. Brewerton spoke without further announcement.

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## **Elder Ted E. Brewerton**

My thoughts at this time will be in the form of a dialogue between me and my fourteen-year-old son, Michael, who resides with us in Argentina. I will talk about how important he is and how much the Lord and I love him. At the same time I address these critical thoughts to him, they would be the same as I would express to my son David, the eldest of my six children, or to their four beautiful sisters, my daughters, Michelle, Andrea, Leanne, and Lycia.

### **Importance of each person**

Fathers, would you like to join me and share the same thoughts as if directed to your sons and daughters, describing their singular importance in the eyes of our Heavenly Father?

Hi, Michael, you know how much I trust and love you, don't you? Let me try to show you who you are and how very important you are as a literal son of our Father in Heaven.

President Harold B. Lee said that this understanding of who we are is "of