

Elder Douglas J. Martin; and then, from our neighbor to the north, the

dominion of Canada, Elder Alexander B. Morrison.

Elder Douglas J. Martin

Heed the Spirit's whisperings to serve

My dear brethren and sisters, several years ago in general conference, I listened as President Kimball encouraged those who had reared their families to sell their camper vans, leave their grandchildren behind, and, for a year or two, give their lives to the service of the Savior Jesus Christ in the mission field. His comments struck a chord in me, and when I returned home to New Zealand, I repeated what he said to my wife.

We decided that we would make our plans to be ready to serve by retiring a little earlier than we otherwise might have, and to do this when I turned sixty in April 1987. We told our sons, and while they said little, they were attuned to and supported us in our desires. I likewise informed my business colleagues three or four years ahead of time.

As 1987 approached, all our plans were falling neatly into place. I anticipated several months of doing many pleasant things, of which I had dreamed for years. Then in time, our mission call would come.

One day in late March of this year, however, I received a phone call that resulted in our coming to general conference in Salt Lake City ahead of that planned retirement date in April.

How grateful we are that we heeded the whisperings of the Spirit when listening to President Kimball several years ago!

There must be many in different nations in the Church today who are of similar age to ourselves and whose circumstances likewise are the same as ours. Perhaps that same still small voice may also be whispering to you. As it comes, remember the promise

given in revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, "And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good" (D&C 11:12).

Service in the Philippines

Now my wife and I are in the service of the Lord and have been assigned to labor in the islands of the Philippines, Micronesia, and Guam. We are only one month old in our service and our lives have been completely turned around. We went from winter to summer in just twelve hours, and from New Zealand lamb to a delightful fish called *lapu lapu*. We met a typically slender, dark-haired Filipino stake president who quietly responded, "I am the same age as you, Elder Martin."

Soon after our arrival in the Philippines, we left for our first stake conference some one hundred kilometers north. Along the way, we saw the evidence of poverty among so many of those lovely people. This also was a new experience, and our hearts were heavy as we drove. We checked in at a small hotel in a distant town and soon discovered that it lacked many of the facilities we considered normal and were used to. Then suddenly, as we entered the immaculate chapel grounds, our spirits lifted. We were greeted by sunny, smiling faces and outstretched hands, spotless dresses and shirts of dazzling white. We were not strangers or foreigners, but fellow-citizens with these Saints and of the household of God. Soon to follow was my most unforgettable Philippine experience thus far.

As we moved along the line exchanging handshakes and greetings, one slight young woman shyly extended her arm. As I took it, I realized

that she had no hand on it or on her other arm. We exchanged smiles and moved along.

I next encountered this young sister after she and her husband were invited to speak as a young couple married within the last eighteen months in the Manila Temple. When she arose to speak, I noticed that in addition to being born without hands, this young woman had an artificial leg. As first she and then her husband spoke, there unfolded a most remarkable story about their lives.

The stake president was her father. Despite what to others may have been a handicap, but what to her must have been only a difficulty, this young sister had completed a full-term proselyting mission. She described in beautiful terms her feelings about going to the Manila Temple to be married. Hers was a talk of such maturity in gospel understanding and humility that it would have been difficult to equal anywhere in the Church. Then her husband stood and told of how he had written to his girlfriend after being in the mission field two months and later toward the end, of how he wanted to marry her in the Manila Temple when he returned home. There were no second thoughts, no change of heart when far removed, but instead, a growing understanding of the meaning and blessing of temple marriage for them both.

As they proudly showed us their baby after conference, and when we considered the splendid achievements of this young husband and wife, we recalled the Savior's words, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

Missionary couples are blessed

Since then, we have been to different places in the Philippines. Everywhere we meet missionary couples, a number of whom are older than ourselves. The Johnsons, a couple from Fremont, California, labor in distant

Vigan. They have been in the Church only a handful of years since their baptism. In Vigan, the carabao, or water buffalo, and motor tricycles are almost the only mode of transport. The Johnsons have a beautiful attitude.

Whenever I meet and talk with missionary couples, I am filled with love and respect for their humility and desire to help the Filipino Saints. They regard their missions as one of the great opportunities to serve the Master in their lives. They always ask, "How many grandchildren have you?" Our response of eight is quickly overshadowed with "We have sixteen," or "twenty-three," or maybe "twenty-seven," and almost always with "And there are two we haven't seen yet." They miss their family and grandchildren, but don't complain. Instead, they look forward to that great homecoming reunion. Meanwhile, they are given all the love they can absorb from devoted Filipino Saints.

Like us, all these missionary couples are finding new purpose and fulfillment in their lives. Section 4 of the Doctrine and Covenants is taking on new meaning.

"Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work;

"For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul" (vs. 3-4).

I pray that couples whose families are grown may indeed listen to and obey the Spirit that prompts the call to prepare and serve the Lord in the mission field. I know that this is the Lord's church, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that President Benson is God's prophet on earth today. I am grateful to be a member of the Church and for all the blessings it has brought into my life and the lives of my family. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.