

knowledge of the scriptures. The most difficult part of the class was to terminate the discussion in time to send them on to their regular high school classes. As the school year progressed, I watched each student gain greater confidence, closer friendships, and a growing testimony of the gospel.

A few years ago I was in a grocery store in a city not far from here when I heard someone call out my name. I turned to greet two of my former seminary students. They were now husband and wife. They introduced me to their four beautiful children. As we visited I was amazed with the number of seminary classmates they still had contact with after all these years. It was an evidence of a special bonding that had occurred in that very early morning seminary class. As we parted, a scripture came into my mind: "I will call you friends, for you are my friends, and ye shall have an inheritance with me" (D&C 93:45). There is a special strength we gain from associations with each other, especially in gospel settings.

### Take advantage of this opportunity

Plan on completing the full four years of seminary. You know the institute is available for all students and non-students between the ages of 18 and 30.

Are you enrolled? If not, I invite you to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity. And to you who are enrolled, study diligently to learn the gospel. I promise you that the foundation you receive in these two great programs will bless you throughout your lives. This is my witness to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, even Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang "Glorious Things Are Sung of Zion."

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### President Hinckley

Elder L. Tom Perry of the Twelve has spoken to us, and the Tabernacle Choir has sung to us.

The choir and congregation will now join in singing "Redeemer of Israel."

Elder Harold G. Hillam of the Presidency of the Seventy and Sunday School general president will then speak to us, and he will be followed by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

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The choir and congregation sang "Redeemer of Israel."

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## Elder Harold G. Hillam

### A letter from 1899

This historic letter that I hold in my hand was typed 98 years ago. Each sheet is placed in a plastic, sealed envelope to protect it. Though written nearly a century ago, the words contained on these pages have a great deal of significance for us today.

The year 1899 marked a jubilee celebration—the 50-year anniversary of the organization of the first Sunday School

of the Church. As a culmination of that jubilee year, a time capsule in the form of a beautiful hand-carved box was filled with items considered to have meaning for those who would be present at its opening 50 years in the future.

Accordingly, in 1949 the time capsule was opened, and among other historical items was this letter addressed to the "General Sunday School Authorities of A.D. 1949." The letter includes the following:

“The establishment of the first Sunday Schools in the Rocky Mountains was attended with hardships and discouragements. The people were in a dry and barren land and were subjected to many privations. It required all their time and strength to secure the necessaries of life; yet in the midst of it all, with the limited facilities at hand, they began the education of their children.”

The letter continues: “Now brethren, we can but dimly see what the next fifty years will do for the youth of Zion. The methods of today may be entirely abandoned for new ones to be discovered in the future.

“It is probable that when you receive this Jubilee box, many of us, whose names are signed to this greeting, will have passed to the other side with the great army of Sunday School workers, and the greeting therefore of those of us who have gone to the great beyond, will be to you as a voice from the dead.

“This Sunday School work has been to us a labor of love and our interest does not merely exist for today, but extends into the future.

“ . . . We beseech you that whatever may be the methods employed, whatever may be the changes wrought in the fifty years to come, that you never forget for an instant the object of the great Sunday School work, viz: To teach the children the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to make Latter Day Saints of them.”

The letter was signed by the general Sunday School presidency, as well as 21 other board members, including Joseph F. Smith and Heber J. Grant, both of whom later served as President of the Church.

### **Technological advances of our day**

The letter was prophetic. Indeed, the signers may have seen only dimly what the next 50 years would bring for the youth of Zion. During that time the communication methods of the late 19th

century were totally replaced by tremendous advances in the dissemination of information. Even the typewriter used to prepare this 1899 document was at the time a recent novelty and was the cutting edge in communication! The first broadcast of the human voice was still two years away. The first radio network broadcast was 21 years in the future, and general conference would not be transmitted over radio for another 25 years.

Could the writers of this 1899 letter have imagined, even dimly, the technological advances—the radio, color television, computers, the Internet, or the programming—that are present today, they would have been astounded to learn that just one small computer disk would contain large collections of the greatest of books and talks known to mankind. They would have seen that with just a few keystrokes of the computer, one could open the scriptures and with ease cross-reference them with other great talks and writings of the prophets, and with the attending light and knowledge which comes from God.

### **Tools can be used to teach good or evil**

Sadly, they also would have seen that the very same tools that teach light and truth can, with the same ease but with different strokes of the keys, bring to view some of the most vile, sordid, wicked, and immoral material.

Indeed, we have been blessed with magnificent tools and methods which can be used to assist in teaching, but as with all tools, they are to be used with wisdom and discretion if they are to bless and simplify our lives. Just as fire under control brings so many comforts and benefits, a fire improperly used or out of control wreaks havoc and destruction.

### **Use technological tools wisely**

As we prepare for another 50 or 100 years, we might also see but dimly what

lies ahead. We must learn to make wise use of the tools and technology that we have.

Wise use of our technology would include care in that which we invite into our homes by the way of television, videos, computers, including the Internet. There is much that is good and edifying in the media, but there is also much that is gross, immoral, and time-consuming, enticing us to be “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). During the Second World War when gasoline was in short supply and rationed, I remember signs saying, “Is this trip necessary?” Today, with ever increasing demands on everyone and time in short supply, might we ask ourselves before we turn on the video game, the television, the computer, or access the many programs available, “Is this trip necessary?”

Perhaps every person who is listening might also ask these questions of himself or herself and expect an honest reply: “Is the information I am receiving from this tool of learning edifying and adding truth into my life? Are the hours I am investing an effective use of my valuable time? Does this computer game assist me in fulfilling my responsibilities and goals?” If the answer is not a resounding yes, then we should have the courage and determination to click the off button and direct our lives to more important tasks.

### **Importance of dedicated teachers**

Despite the staggering technological advances of the past century, one of the elements of this 1899 letter still remains constant: that is, the importance of well-trained, humble, dedicated, and loving teachers.

Everyone can remember a special teacher who has made a profound difference in their life. I will ever be thankful to Miss Hamilton, my second-grade teacher. She was also my Sunday School teacher. I can still recall her saying,

“Now remember, always be a good boy!” and “I am so proud of you.” She always made me feel very important. I grew to love her, and I’m sure she loved me. That school year was a glorious one. I hated to see it come to a close. The news traveled fast in the small town of Sugar City, Idaho, and one summer day my mother called me in the house to inform me of the disastrous news: my dear Miss Hamilton had gone and gotten married! And she didn’t even check with me to see if it was all right.

Our daughter-in-law, also a teacher, received a note at the end of a school year from one of her third-grade students. He wrote, “Miss Scoresby, I will miss you more than my pet gerbil that died.”

### **We are a church of teachers**

We are in essence a church of teachers. Regardless of life’s circumstances or the nature of one’s calling, all members of the Church have the opportunity to teach and to testify. The very nature of our lives bears witness of what we believe and teaches all who come within our sphere of influence.

Many, perhaps most, adult members of the Church, however, find themselves in a position to teach in a more direct manner. Leaders, parents, and called teachers have the specific responsibility to constantly improve their teaching abilities so they can prepare, train, and edify those who fall within their stewardship. President David O. McKay reminded us that “the proper training of childhood is man’s most important and sacred duty” (*Gospel Ideals* [1953], 220). The Lord has made it clear that parents shall “teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:28).

### **Feed the spirit and nourish the soul**

There is power in the doctrines of the Church—hence the need for us all

to be ever learning and constantly fortifying ourselves spiritually. President Hinckley has said: "The forces against which we labor are tremendous. We need more than our own strength to cope with them. To all who hold positions of leadership, to the vast corps of teachers and missionaries, to heads of families, I should like to make a plea: In all you do, feed the Spirit—nourish the soul. . . . I am satisfied that the world is starved for spiritual food" (in *Conference Report*, Oct. 1967, 89; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1967, 85–86).

President Hinckley made that statement nearly 30 years ago at a general conference. Then, how much more need

have we to be spiritually fortified today! Indeed, inspired gospel teaching among all members of the Church is a lifeline to the spiritual stability and growth of members of all ages.

Technology will surely advance and methods will certainly change, but the personal touch by a dedicated, loving teacher who radiates the Spirit is the key to filling the desire of the writers of this 1899 document, which was to teach the children and others the "principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; to make Latter Day Saints of them." In the name of the greatest teacher of all, even Jesus Christ, amen.

## Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

### Spiritual hunger in our day

Some time ago I read an essay referring to "metaphysical hunger"<sup>1</sup> in the world. The author was suggesting that the souls of men and women were dying, so to speak, from lack of spiritual nourishment in our time. That phrase, "metaphysical hunger," came back to me last month when I read the many richly deserved tributes paid to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. One correspondent recalled her saying that as severe and wrenching as physical hunger was in our day—something she spent virtually her entire life trying to alleviate—nevertheless, she believed that the absence of spiritual strength, the paucity of spiritual nutrition, was an even more terrible hunger in the modern world.

These observations reminded me of the chilling prophecy from the prophet Amos, who said so long ago, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

### Modern spiritual calamities

As the world slouches toward the 21st century, many long for something, sometimes cry out for something, but too often scarcely know for what. The economic condition in the world, speaking generally and certainly not specifically, is probably better than it has ever been in history, but the human heart is still anxious and often filled with great stress. We live in an "information age" that has a world of data available literally at our fingertips, yet the meaning of that information and the satisfaction of using knowledge in some moral context seems farther away for many than ever before.

The price for building on such sandy foundations is high. Too many lives are buckling when the storms come and the winds blow.<sup>3</sup> In almost every direction, we see those who are dissatisfied with present luxuries because of a gnawing fear that others somewhere have more of them. In a world desperately in need of moral leadership, too often we see what Paul called "spiritual wickedness in high places."<sup>4</sup> In an absolutely terrifying way,