

*Chapter 14*

# Education and Provident Living in an Expanding Church

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WHAT A WONDERFUL occasion to talk about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as it moves out into the world! In the early days of the Church, the effort was to gather the members of the Church to Zion and to help establish in their hearts and in their lives a society in which they could grow up and make their contributions in their communities and, subsequently, the world. The efforts of our day have changed a little bit from that early effort. Whereas we first brought Zion to these valleys of the mountains and to these concentrations, where we could be unfettered in some ways in living our religion, now there is a major effort to take Zion to the world and to establish Zion in the world—wherever there are stakes and wards of the Church established. Years ago, we were in a meeting with President Spencer W. Kimball with Church Educational System (CES) administrators, and his early comments were, “Brethren, we follow the priesthood, don’t we?” And literally that has been the effort in Church education: to follow the priesthood; to support, assist, and sustain their efforts; and to strengthen the members of the Church, whom we are charged to serve. My desire is to describe briefly some

things that are happening in Church education—meaning religious education, especially as it expands out into the world.

I have titled this chapter “Education and Provident Living in an Expanding Church.” Provident living, as the Church has used it over the years, really speaks about preparing wisely for the future—living providently while doing our best to both prepare for the future and also enjoy those blessings that are presently available to us.

I represent CES on the religious education side, and we have special appreciation in this day for the things that are happening in a concentrated effort from many departments of the Church. This includes priesthood leaders, Area Presidencies, CES leaders, the Church Board of Education, and some thirty-eight to forty thousand volunteers who help throughout the world in teaching and administering CES programs. The new Perpetual Education Fund, in many ways, has brought together and allowed some things to happen between CES, welfare, and a number of other Church departments in serving these young people of the Church. I think this is providential and part of the destiny of this Church, as we consider this statement from the Prophet Joseph Smith, “The greatest temporal and spiritual blessings . . . never attended individual exertion or enterprise.”<sup>1</sup> There are some unique blessings coming to the Church because of the working together and teamwork of the agencies of the Church. There is an urgency in this day in which we live in assisting priesthood leaders working with young adults internationally. Some quick statistics: In Brazil alone there are 230,000 young adult members of the Church. About forty-five thousand of them are considered active or attend Church at some point during a given month. About 5 percent of those serve missions. After their missions, many of them become less active in the Church because of the lack of education, jobs, and Church association. As President Gordon B. Hinckley has said, they go back to their poverty and to the difficult circumstances from which they have come.

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1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 183.

Let me share with you a few statistics in terms of six countries which are all heavily populated in terms of young adult members of the Church. These six countries—Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and the Philippines—are all Latin American, except the Philippines. There are great numbers in those various countries, totaling 1.7 million young adult members of the Church. The activity rate of those members that we can anticipate would be in church on a given Sunday is about 300,000 of the 1.7 million overall. Institute enrollment in the various institutes in all these countries is less than 10 percent of the total members and about just over half of the active members. We have some work cut out for us in terms of working with potential institute students. The percent of active members enrolled ranges from a high of 77 percent in Peru down to 26 percent in Mexico; overall, 54 percent of the active members of the Church are involved in the institute program. Of that total pool of young adult members of the Church, there are a number who are serving missions or who have recently served missions.

A couple years ago, we had a preliminary effort in a pilot program that President Hinckley and the Board of Education authorized to be extended in Mexico and Brazil to try and reach some of these young adult members. In this expanded program, we offered, in addition to our normal institute classes, some English classes and computer literacy classes to try and help these young returned missionaries learn English, for which there were jobs available in most cases. It has been about three or four years since that effort was initiated. It has now blended into the Perpetual Education Fund as a joint effort.

To demonstrate this effort, I will illustrate using the Lima North Institute. There was an explosion of enrollment when these new classes were offered. In ten months, we went from an enrollment of 195 to 1,136 students. We did not know where to put them. We had two small homes rented—and we still do. We have not been able to get our building built yet. The other Lima institute showed an equal

explosion of growth. The use of the institute building was dramatic. They started in most cases at 6 a.m. and would finish at 11 p.m. or later. The desire of these young people to get on a computer was tremendous. They would sign up not only to take the computer classes, which were taught by volunteers, but they would also sign up to do their practicing on the computer, starting at six in the morning and going until midnight or thereabouts—as late as we would let them stay in the building.

We found that starting the English and computer class in the institute program spawned a number of other programs with the young people—twenty-seven other “classes.” We put classes in quotes because none of them were for credit at the institute but came about because of interest and the abilities of these young people to stimulate interest in special programs. These classes enhance the sociality of the institute program in many ways, with offerings in dance, piano, organ, aerobics, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Russian. They had music classes where they learned to sing, and then they would sing for one another at the start of their classes. In Peru there was a finance class in Quechua, and there were some preuniversity classes so that some of the students could be admitted to universities. They had a wonderful experience with some eight hundred students involved. The institute became a hive of activity, and it was and still is a wonderful place to be. Those young people are hard to turn off once they get started and have such a good experience.

There are scriptures that support what is happening in Church education: “Wherefore, the things of which I have read are things pertaining to things both temporal and spiritual.” The Lord speaks about both sides of our nature. Nephi records, “It appears that the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations. . . . Nevertheless, after they shall be nursed by the Gentiles, and the Lord has lifted up his hand upon the Gentiles and set them up for a standard, and their children have been carried in their arms, and their daughters have been carried upon their shoulders, behold these things of which are spoken

are temporal; for thus are the covenants of the Lord with our fathers” (1 Nephi 22:3, 6).

Nephi goes on to say:

And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders. . . .

Wherefore, he will bring them again out of captivity, and they shall be gathered together to the lands of their inheritance; and they shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. (1 Nephi 22:8, 12)

I have been in Lima, helping with some of this initial effort in implementing some of the Perpetual Education Fund as it works with institutes and in the institute program. I trained some of our local institute directors for the role they will play. We asked some of the students who came and who were applying for some of these first loans from the Church what their reaction was when they heard President Hinckley’s announcement. It was interesting to hear their response. Most of them said that they wept. They knew that the Lord was conscious of their needs and their desperation when they did not know what to do or where to turn. They were so grateful. This response is interesting in light of the scripture that says they will “be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:12). In discussing linkage of institutes with education, job placement, and a broader role, President J. Kent Jolley of the Brazil South Area said, “This is the most important thing that could be done for the Church in Brazil. We have to act now, or we will lose this whole generation of members.”

We have asked ourselves a few questions. First, can the institute program become a catalyst to provident living—both to have the sociality and the enjoyment of membership now but also to prepare for the future among Latter-day Saint young adults? Second,

as the institute is such a great gathering place for young adults, how can we assist the students to seek educational training, obtain job placements, and prepare to arise out of obscurity in context of an institute? How do we stay true, in our CES role, to our trust and also implement these important and good developments in international institutes?

Our objective given to us by the Church Board of Education is to assist in accomplishing the mission of the Church—to teach students the gospel, to provide a spiritual and social climate, and to prepare young adults for Church service. It seemed that the board had already put in place the basic parameters in which we could operate. Then we made recommendations, within the context of the Perpetual Education Fund, to work with priesthood leaders to get newly returned missionaries and all young adults to become actively involved in the institute, because of the association and the spirituality that occurs there and the strengthening of young people and their testimonies. Another objective is to work with Employment Resource Services to get career planning and training for students. A third objective is to bring family history courses into institute during this time of temple building, including computer usage. That seemed to be a natural solution because it would give students the opportunity to become a little more confident on computers, within context of what the Church has asked institute programs to do.

The institute must enhance the idea of a gathering place of young single adults; the activities should facilitate the gathering. We would add, as we proposed, a wraparound class in institute, one which could be started at any time. When young men and young women come off of their missions or when they are activated in the Church and enrolled in this class, they could start the class at any point and then continue through the next semester with the first few classes they had missed as they enrolled. This class is now in a draft form, we have it out, and it is going the same places the Perpetual Education Fund is; it is called Provident Living. We have given it a tentative number, and there are some marvelous things in it. When

Elder John K. Carmack read the draft, he said, “I think those principles were never taught before in the Church, but there is surely a need now.” We look forward to what this might add to the institute in terms of provident living, to help students prepare for the future and answer the questions: How am I going to support a family? What can I do so I can eventually give service to the Church? And what can I do to then prepare to be in a situation as a mother and father to raise my children in the Church in faithfulness?

We have thought we could set up computer training—where appropriate—to enhance the students’ use of the family history course and their general literacy with computers. We could encourage other enhancements to the institute classes and activities as budgets, talents, and interests may allow. This means that if a group of students had certain talents and abilities, they could be involved in serving one another and preparing themselves for effective Church service.

We are currently working to provide buildings and full-time employees to support the enrollments and programs. In our institutes internationally we are sharing office space for employment resources and family history. We are jointly serving these young people. Another factor we are actively involved in is using Brigham Young University interns and faculty, as available, to support career planning, family history, and so forth, in institutes, with accountabilities, job descriptions, and budgets set up to allow those things to happen.

The context of our efforts would be first to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. We use scriptures to teach English, enhanced by the use of computers, whether using the TALL or Elis or other programs that would be appropriate. And as a peripheral step, we would provide computer training to enhance family history and the use of computers among the students. Again, President Jolley said, “This is the most important thing that could be done for the Church in Brazil. We have to act now, or we will lose this whole generation of members.”

In conclusion, the Doctrine and Covenants says: “Ye cannot behold with your natural eyes, for the present time, the design of your God concerning those things which shall come hereafter. . . . Behold, verily I say unto you, for this cause I have sent you, . . . that you might be honored in laying the foundation, . . . that a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor . . . unto which all nations shall be invited. . . . And after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come” (D&C 58:3, 6–9, 11).

We are taking Zion to the nations of the world where the stakes and the young people already are and where the gospel is established, and we are trying to help them build themselves strong in a way that will allow the Lord to do His marvelous work among them in preparation for those days to come.

I express gratitude to so many, those who are here, and a number of others who are not, all of whom have been part of this ongoing effort. I think we are just on the threshold. The tip of the iceberg seems to be in sight. We have no idea of all the dimensions of this wonderful iceberg that we are starting to float on in this world of building Zion throughout the world. I pray that the Lord’s blessings be with us in this effort.

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