



## GLOBAL LESSONS FROM A LOCAL STAKE

**B**UDDY and Cindy Richards and their daughter Katie moved to southwest Provo in 1977. Two years later, Jessie Embry arrived in the area. The Franklin neighborhood, one of Provo's early pioneer settlements, included a mixture of old and new construction. The two homes owned by the Richards family and Sister Embry represented the extremes. The Richards family bought an old adobe home. Sister Embry moved into a new condo in the Richards family's backyard. A growing family and a single woman were not typical residents. Initially their neighbors were longtime residents, older couples or widows, and short-stay Brigham Young University students. Shortly after Sister Embry and the Richards family moved into the area, the Provo Utah West Stake was divided and the Provo Utah South Stake was created.

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Years later, in 2008, Embry, associate director at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University, suggested to Richards, a former bishop of three wards in the Provo South Stake and then the stake president and a professor in the McKay School of Education, that she conduct “A Year in the Life of the Provo Utah South Stake” project. While the idea sounded workable at first, it became clear that Richards was in an awkward position. He knew more about the stake than he could report because of his confidential leadership position. Still, he provided important insights. Embry added her own observations and used oral histories gathered by Brigham Young University students employed by the Redd Center.<sup>1</sup> Even with these limitations, this study shows some of the roles that this stake provides for its wards and members in the twenty-first century and introduces some of the modern challenges of integrating diverse cultural backgrounds into the common purposes of the Church.

The Provo Utah South Stake is quite different from stakes outside the Wasatch Front, where travel takes up a great portion of the stake president’s time. Richards can ride his bike around the entire circumference of the stake boundaries in just a few minutes. Despite the small geographic size, though, the Provo Utah South Stake’s twelve wards are very diverse and provide unique challenges. They include two Spanish wards, the Utah Valley Deaf Ward, a Native American ward for all of Utah County, and a young single adult ward (ages 19–30) that communicates in English, ASL, and Spanish. When Richards and Embry moved to the area, the wards on the north side of the railroad tracks matched what is sometimes referred to in the Church as the “newly wed and nearly dead.” South of the tracks were farms, vacant land, and trailer courts.

Over the years, the neighborhood changed. In the north, old homes were torn down and replaced with new owner-occupied dwellings.<sup>2</sup> While trailers remain in the south, some were replaced by townhomes, apartments, and the Provo Town Centre Mall. The major exception was the Meadow Apartments, which expanded to Pebble Creek and then with federal funds became the Boulders Apartments. In 2008 the four pioneer neighborhood

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wards continued to house students, older residents (although Richards and Embry have now become the older residents), and young families in new homes. Other wards split the Boulders Apartments, where 380 of its 386 units are mandated by law to be rented exclusively to low-income individuals and families (below 50 percent of the median income of the county) and most of the residents receive welfare assistance.

Embry's past research has focused on the ward, which provides a community for most members.<sup>3</sup> Yet the stake is a very important unit with much of its work to support wards being done in the background. As a result, most members really do not understand how a stake operates because their only contact with other wards is at conferences, large activities, or haphazard contact with other members who meet in the same buildings. Their interaction with stake leaders is limited to monthly high council speakers, annual ward conferences, youth meetings, and temple recommend interviews. They do not realize that every month the bishoprics gather as a stake for training and the elders quorum presidencies also gather for training. Monthly interviews occur between the bishops and the stake president. One of Richards's most important roles as stake president is to support the bishops, and there is about a 40 percent annual turnover in the stake membership. The turnover in stake leadership, bishoprics, elders quorums, and ward clerks means that a great deal of the stake presidency's time is spent issuing calls and reorganizing presidencies and group leadership.

Besides turnover, the stake faces other unique challenges. The highest concentration of low-income nonstudent residents in Provo City reside within its boundaries. This poses a great challenge to finding and maintaining stable leadership. It also means that the welfare demands on the bishops is constant and substantial. One ward, for example, has averaged at least one food order per day for the entire year, which makes the bishop's job almost a full-time responsibility. An additional concern is that Church welfare tries to teach self-reliance, but conditions make this almost impossible. One bishop surveyed ward members just before he was released and discovered there were "138 mentally or emotionally handicapped" members in his

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ward. Disabilities included schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and multiple-personality disorder. With so many welfare cases, the potential for welfare fraud is also a constant concern, and finding a sufficient number of experienced clerks to help monitor these concerns is difficult. In 2009, the stake was assigned to sponsor the Transient Welfare Services for the Utah County area. Because of their experience with the welfare population, it makes sense that they should help develop the operating policies of this office.

Because of this concentration of welfare challenges and the lack of stable leadership, the stake was given permission in May 2006 to create its own version of Salt Lake City's Inner City Project.<sup>4</sup> The stake leadership requested that other stakes provide mature couples who could serve for one to two years as service missionaries. Set apart by their home ward bishops, these couples are assigned to one of the wards and the bishop can use them wherever he feels they are most needed. The bishops in the most challenged wards use the service missionaries to operate a type of welfare triage. They analyze the circumstances and fill out the needs and resources forms in preparation for meetings with the bishop. They then follow up on the bishop's request after he determines what help, if any, the Church should provide.

These service missionaries have been a huge blessing—especially in the wards south of the railroad tracks, where there are so few owner-occupied homes (other than the trailers) and stable priesthood leaders. For example, in 2009, Bishop Eric Speckhard of the Freedom Second Ward had service missionaries for both of his counselors and at least one in nearly every auxiliary presidency. The missionaries conducted home visits, taught special institute and finance classes, conducted a major canning project, and provided counseling. While the help that the missionaries provided for the stake is apparent, they also felt they benefitted. Church service missionary Jerry Bauer, who moved from California to the Grandview Neighborhood, noted that the South Stake provided more opportunities to serve than did his home ward, which included many former stake presidents, bishops, and mission presidents. He quipped that on “the hill” he had felt he was attending a Protestant church because his services were not needed.<sup>5</sup> The experience has been so

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rewarding for the missionaries that many have asked to extend their service. Elder Richard Hill was recently requested by his home ward bishop to return in 2010. Hill had served for more than four years in the Provo Utah South Stake and would have been happy to continue.

Language missionaries have also been called from other stakes to serve in the Provo Utah South Stake's Spanish units. This has had mixed reviews. Some of these missionaries have had a great experience, but others have felt underutilized. According to Richards, it has been hard for some of the bishops, especially those in the Spanish wards, to know how best to use the missionaries. In many ways the Spanish units have fewer needs than some of the Anglo wards. When Richards was called, he was told that he would preside over the highest-baptizing unit in North America—primarily because of the one Spanish ward in the stake at time.

While the language units sometimes do not know how to use the service missionaries, missionaries have learned how to help the wards. Angus Belliston, a former regional representative, and his wife, Jenny, were called to work in a Spanish ward even though they did not speak the language. They looked around at what the ward was missing and decided that they needed a Boy Scout program. The Bellistons worked very hard on instituting a program, and since then it has grown quite strong. At a special court of honor, eight Scouts—all from Spanish wards—received Eagle awards in one evening. According to Richards, this was a remarkable accomplishment by itself but especially remarkable for Spanish units that did not have a Boy Scout tradition. For the occasion, the Spanish members invited the Bellistons back and praised them for their efforts. Belliston was embarrassed because he felt the focus should be on the boys. But the ward felt that the Bellistons had gone the extra mile to make Scouting happen.

With so many wards and varieties of cultural and economic backgrounds, how does the stake meet all the needs? One of the main factors is showing love and concern. Several members of the Spanish wards especially felt that love. Manuel Jesus Castillo, a former revolutionary leader in Peru and a convert to the Church, explained, "The stake president really cares for the Hispanic

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people. He loves them.”<sup>6</sup> Brenda Beyal, a Navajo in the Franklin Second Ward and the wife of the bishop, declared: “Our stake is fantastic. President Richards is one of the most awesome stake presidents you can have. He is definitely a man of God. He’s somebody who listens to the Lord. . . . We’re such a unique stake because our stake president gathers everybody.”<sup>7</sup>

One way the stake president shows this love is by including members from all the wards in stake leadership. This starts with the stake presidency. The first counselor, Kent C. Nielsen, complains that he signs with a hearing accent, but he has been involved with the Utah Valley Deaf Ward because he has children who are deaf. The second counselor, Victor A. Rodriguez, is from Guatemala. The high council and stake auxiliary leadership include members from all of the diverse cultures represented in the stake. Beyal was especially impressed. After pointing out that at one time there was only one stake leader from her ward, she continued: “Now the stake Young Men president is from our ward. . . . We have two high councilors from our ward. We have the stake Young Women camp leader director from our ward. I’m in the Young Women presidency. . . . We’re in equal partnership in this stake.”<sup>8</sup>

Another way that Richards encourages unity is by expecting the specialized units to stand on their own and provide service to their ward members and to the stake. There is a tendency for leaders to not expect as much from foreign-language units because they are unique. But Richards treats the wards as equals and expects as much from them as he does from any other ward. They are expected to accept assignments, pay their tithes and offerings, provide for the missionaries they send, and develop their own leaders.

This attitude transfers to the bishops. Randy King, a former stake clerk, explains the experience with the Native American ward. “A very unusual thing about that ward is the bishop [Anthony Beyal] actually interviews people before they can become a member of that ward. If you think about it, it’s not actually racial. It’s not even a special ward by Church definition. It’s a regular ward. They don’t have in parentheses, after the name of the ward, ‘Spanish’ or ‘Deaf.’ It is just Franklin Second Ward.” In that interview, according to King,

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the bishop tells the Native Americans that the ward is not a place to hide. They cannot join the ward if they do not plan on attending.<sup>9</sup>

For Richardo Cetz, a convert from Mexico, the stake's strength is that it gives members from different cultures the opportunity to be distinct. "They have the Spanish ward and they have the hearing-impaired one. . . . I think that's a good thing to me because sometimes you just feel alienated from people trying to fit in."<sup>10</sup> Anglo Paul Brimhall, a lifetime member, says he enjoys "a rainbow of the Church here. We're all very colorful, and I know the Brethren are watching us with a magnifying glass to see how we do. They're praying for us. It's exciting."<sup>11</sup>

But as with all situations, not everyone believes the stake works all the time. Gisela Mandujano from Venezuela and her husband, Nicolas, from Mexico City are both converts to the Church. Gisela does not feel "comfortable" in the Spanish-speaking ward "because I am not Mexican. The Mexican people look at me very different. . . . They make me feel out of the group." Gisela also struggled with stake activities. She once went to a dance that "was very nice and very well organized"; however, she felt that she was not invited to share her talents. For her, the biggest barrier was language. She attends stake activities but says, "I feel weird by going to them because I don't speak English. I understand it, but I inhibit myself." Gisela's husband, Nicolas, said his sons loved attending a Boy Scout activity, "but they felt there was certain division among the American and the Hispanic kids."<sup>12</sup>

Other Spanish-speaking members have expressed the same concerns. Blanca Juarez pointed out that while the stake members "are very friendly towards us, there is always division among the members."<sup>13</sup> Juliana Cordoba, a convert from Mexico, agreed: "We just say hi to each other. . . . [The English-speaking members] don't try to make a friendship because they think that I might not understand them." But at the same time she felt that at the few stake activities that she had attended, "the sisters from the stake are very nice to us. They want to know more about us." Her husband, Alfredo, also a convert from Mexico, explains, "I have been in the United States for fifteen years; sometimes I have felt a little bit rejected by the people, even by members of the Church."<sup>14</sup>

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Even as a member of the stake Primary presidency, Adriana Olvera, a convert from Mexico, wished for more friends. She attended an English-speaking ward for years and then transferred to a Spanish ward. She enjoyed working in the stake but she felt other members of the presidency were merely “Church-calling friends.” She saw cultural differences: “[Mexicans] are more open, and we establish friendship.”<sup>15</sup>

But should there be more interaction? Claudia Gosain from Mexico City enjoyed the stake activities and felt that the stake members “get all together and have fun.” She added that she didn’t have “a friend relation with all of them. We just greet [each other].” But despite that problem, she still felt it “is very nice to get together, even if you cannot talk to the people. You can feel the harmony in the stake.” But it could be stronger. “I think that we as a stake should be more integrated. I think we should have an activity where we can know more about the culture of the Native Americans or the sign language ward. I think that when you know more, you love more.”<sup>16</sup>

What activities do bring the stake members together? During the year the stake sponsored its traditional programs, including two June stake conferences, a July twenty-fourth barbeque, a Nativity performance in the Provo Tabernacle, youth programs, and a stake Relief Society dinner before the women’s general conference broadcast. This study started with a stake conference in June and ended with one a year later. Neither stake conference had a General Authority visitor, so both were under the direction of the stake president. At the general meetings, members from all cultures participated. Some prayers were signed or spoken in Spanish. There were speakers from all the language groups. Just as the stake leadership represents various cultures, there is a feeling that the stake meetings should also include everyone. The presidency often asks if they are including enough representation from all the wards.

How do members feel about stake conferences? Blanca Juarez, who has attended Church since she was four in Mexico and served a mission in her home country, was impressed because she felt the topics discussed were very important.<sup>17</sup> Todd Roach said that stake conference was interesting because “we have a deaf interpreter signing for the deaf members. We have members



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who speak Spanish with earphones on listening to a translation. And occasionally we hear talks and prayers in Spanish. The prayers, of course, are not translated, so we do the best we can to appreciate the message of the Spirit. We'll have a translator, of course, for the speakers. If the deaf pray, we usually have a translator for that."<sup>18</sup>

Kathy Brimhall, who grew up in the area and has now moved back, enjoys all these activities. "I love stake conference. I find it entertaining because they're doing the translating with the deaf in American Sign Language. Then you've got the interpreter and the people in headphones."<sup>19</sup>

Stake conferences are required meetings, but the Provo South Stake has its unique traditions. For years the stake sponsored a Pioneer Day barbeque to bring members together. Alan Cherry, who has lived in the neighborhood on and off for over twenty years, was the high council member in charge. He put a lot of energy into the event because he believed it was one time that the stake could intermingle in an informal way. But he faced some problems, including the lack of a shady pavilion, although makeshift boweries provided some relief from the heat. But a bigger problem was convincing stake members who felt no connection to the pioneers to attend. For Cherry the success of 2008 was getting the Latinos involved. One way that he included Latinos was by providing both Spanish and English music.<sup>20</sup>

Another unique aspect of the pioneer celebration that year was the inclusion of the Native American culture. Alan Groves, a Hopi in the Franklin Second Ward, explained that a member of the bishopric, a Polynesian married to a Navajo, was very disappointed that the only member of the ward who went to the barbeque in 2007 was from the high council. He asked the ward to be more involved, but for many Native Americans, attending a party to honor the Mormons who came and took their ancestors' lands seemed a little awkward. As a youth from the Native American ward teased after being asked to participate in a handcart trek the year earlier, "And what are we supposed to do, attack the other groups?" At the same time, many wanted to support the stake that had taken them in when another stake had disbanded the ward.<sup>21</sup>

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With encouragement from the high council and support from the stake leadership, the Native Americans played an important role at the 2008 cookout. Cherry explained: “The bishop of the Native American ward is someone I’ve known since he was about twelve. I know many people in the Native American ward, or Franklin Second Ward. I know that there are many warm, loving people who need to take their uniqueness and integrate into the larger group. It just is a matter of how to weave it together so that people feel comfortable and people can experience that it’s an enjoyable activity. It’s one that is welcomed. There’s no need for us to segregate.”<sup>22</sup>

To include the Native Americans at the 2008 celebration, stake leaders asked a group from the ward to perform in a Native American drum circle. Groves recalled that the performance was informal; there was an announcement that there would be some Native American songs that people could watch. He was impressed by how many people were interested. After performing a few songs, the leader asked if anybody wanted to participate. Since many did, the group taught some round dances and songs. The event had a great impact on Groves. He realized that the Pioneer Day celebration was less about the pioneers and more of “a chance for our ward, our stake, to get together as a whole.”<sup>23</sup>

The Pioneer Day celebration focused especially on children. Adriana Olvera explained, “The Primary helped with the children’s activities. They brought a handcart so the kids could go and pull the cart. They had pioneer games for the kids. Kids ate, played, and had fun.” She added, “I don’t know if the adults enjoyed it because they just ate.”<sup>24</sup>

Isaias Rojas, a lifetime member from Mexico, could not speak for all the adults, but he felt that the barbeque strengthened the singles ward. He expected people to come and eat and leave. But when he arrived, he saw his fellow ward members serving. “That was a spiritual experience because when I saw them I just felt that I wanted to do something else, so I helped them to serve. . . . The fact that we were all serving, we made sure that everybody had eaten something, and we made sure that everybody was having a fun time. After that we ate a little bit, and after that we helped to clean.”

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He continued, “Why was it memorable? Because I saw the young single adults, deaf, Hispanic, Indian, American—all our members helping, all together—and that helps us to be more united as a ward in a stake activity.”<sup>25</sup>

Another yearly stake activity is a live Nativity program. For years it was held outside the Provo Tabernacle. The audience sat on straw, and the program included a reenactment of Christ’s birth, complete with animals. In 2008 the program was moved into the Tabernacle. Sharee Small, a convert from St. Louis living in the Pioneer Park Ward, enjoyed the opportunity to participate. “Last year I think was my first year doing it. . . . Hanging out like we did tonight is nice with everybody socializing.” This provided an opportunity for her to meet other Latter-day Saints because she found her ward not to be very friendly.<sup>26</sup>

The Nativity program was special for Kathy Brimhall. She said: “I like the Nativity every Christmas. When my granddaughter got here the first time after my daughter got divorced and they were here staying for Christmas, they went to the Nativity, and she took some pieces of straw out of the bales. She brought them home and taped them in her little journal. Ever since, when she became old enough, she participates in the Nativity. So I think that the Nativity production is good and touches many hearts.”<sup>27</sup> Stephen Howe, a young married man with children, remembered participating in the Nativity. “I think when I was in that, I played one of the prophets. I thought it was a really good activity. I enjoyed not only watching it but being involved in it.”<sup>28</sup>

The stake also sponsors activities for priesthood and Relief Society. Rocky Steele, a young married father who was called into the bishopric as a twenty-two-year-old and has since moved, enjoyed attending the priesthood meetings. “There’s just a great camaraderie in the priesthood sessions here. The reason that I mention that is because you would think that with such a transient area that might not be the case. But there are so many of the people that have gotten to know each other. There is great camaraderie, and there are always ice cream bars and Nutty Buddies they dump out on the table afterwards.”<sup>29</sup> (Unfortunately, budget cuts have since eliminated the treats.)

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Katherine Wistisen, a senior citizen living in a townhome, enjoyed the Relief Society gatherings. “When the general Relief Society meeting is held a week before general conference in the fall, the stake Relief Society has a catered meal before the meeting. There is a large group that attends the dinner and those meetings. The evening is very enjoyable. I think it’s a good way to unify the women, to help them get acquainted, and to share the inspiration of the meeting.”<sup>30</sup>

But does the event really gather people together so they can interact? When Embry attended during the year of this study, some very faithful sisters had made soups for the dinner. People stood in line and got their food and then looked for their friends. Members saved seats at tables for their friends. The Spanish-speaking and deaf sisters sat together. Embry spent most of the time observing. When she went to eat, the only space left was at a Spanish-speaking table. All she could do to communicate was to smile.

Adult activities are limited. But that is not unusual because with nearly five thousand members, it is very hard to sponsor an activity that encourages much stake interaction. The standard youth activities bring the teenagers together more often. These programs include youth conferences, girls’ camp, Aaronic Priesthood encampment, and fathers and sons’ activities. The big announcement in 2008 was that because there was too much snow at the campground the girls’ camp was moved to the July fourth weekend. The camp was shortened because of the holiday. Interestingly, the shortened schedule allowed more young women and leaders than usual to participate. It was easier for those who work or attend summer school to participate, and some wanted to have the camp that holiday week more often.

Each year as girls’ camp starts, many leaders worry about how the young women associate only with others from their own wards. Richards attended one year and especially worried that the groups would never become one. He was pleased that as the week continued, the young women broke down the barriers and worked together. Brenda Beyal remembered such a time: “[The Franklin Second Ward’s] young women were playing a game. Some of the girls went down and invited the Utah Valley Deaf Ward to

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come, and they came and joined our ward in this game. They were laughing and just talking. Then there was another ward that came. That night there was our Franklin Second Ward, there was the Utah Valley Deaf ward, and then just a regular ward . . . with all the girls . . . laughing and having a good time. Their wards are special in their own way. We're not saying that there's not a need for a Native American ward; we're saying that we can still come together. We can still be distinct groups, but still come together as one. I think that that happens."<sup>31</sup> As a result, Mexican Claudia Gosain said that her daughter "is always happy to go to girls' camp."<sup>32</sup>

Equally important in the stake were the Aaronic Priesthood Encampment, a weeklong priesthood training session for young men, and the separate overnight fathers and sons' campout. The latter was so looked forward to that as a father of only girls, Richards used to smuggle a couple of his daughters to the campout. Now he takes grandsons. Stake member Rocky Steele enjoyed taking his son to the event because "I get to know a lot of the good brothers in the stake and take my son out. There is a great breakfast. That's a fun activity." He continued: "I like listening to Brother Alan Cherry. He's one of the high council men of the stake. I've listened to him around the campfire a couple times. He's a kind of a comedian, and so he tells some stories and jokes. Those are really good activities. I have a lot of fun at the stake fathers and sons' outings."<sup>33</sup>

The Aaronic Priesthood Encampment often seemed divided like the girls' camps. With a multicultural Young Men's Presidency, the leaders tried to make the encampment fun for everyone. Alan Groves said in other years the wards had done separate activities, but in 2008 he wanted everyone to be involved. The leaders planned more games so the Native Americans and Spanish-speaking members could participate. Groves recalled: "One thing we did do was have each culture come and cook dinner at night. So like one night we had a Hawaiian dinner; one night we had Indian tacos; one night the Spanish wards came up and did Carne Asada. And it was so fun for them to explain, 'This is part of our culture, and here's a way you guys can participate.' The food was really good."<sup>34</sup> Richards pointed out that the

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food arrangement also united the young women's camp, especially those from the Native American ward.

The young singles ward in the stake does not wait for stake activities to meet together. It is a ward that communicates in three languages: Spanish, English, and American Sign Language. In addition, people from all the economic and cultural backgrounds represented in the stake belong. The ward was organized at the June stake conference in 2008. Benjamin Larsen, the stake executive secretary at the time, was released and called as bishop of the new ward. Larsen served a Spanish mission and attended the Utah Valley Deaf Ward because he and his wife have a daughter who is deaf. A choir of young single adults performed at stake conference in three languages.

According to Richards, the stake presidency debated the formation of the ward. The single adults in the specialized wards, especially the Spanish and the Utah Valley Deaf wards, were very strong, but the other wards struggled with their YSA programs. Richards believed that a singles ward in the stake would be successful only if the specialty units became the core of the ward (not merely tangentially invited) and then reached out to the English-speaking young singles. A fireside was held in each of the specialty units to determine if the young people in those wards would step up to the opportunity to lead out. At first the members were a little reluctant since it was not going to be only an ASL (or Spanish or Native American) ward, but when they recognized that they were needed, they enthusiastically agreed to support the new ward.

As with other specialized wards, Richards felt the ward would only work if members were expected to provide all the Church services and recognized the vision to worship together. And many members did. Richards hopes that the single ward, with its diverse groups worshipping together, might be a model for other wards. Bryndi Cloward, who had attended the Utah Valley Deaf Ward since she could sign, was called to be the first Relief Society president of the singles ward. She had a prompting that the ward was coming and that she would have the calling. Her goal with the ward was to "bring forth what President Richards sees, but we sure pray for it and that we can accomplish the vision that the stake president had." That vision for Cloward was that

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we could have multicultural differences. If you think about it, there's different culture with the Spanish, there's a different culture with the Deaf, and there's a different culture with Native Americans. Everybody in between has their own culture. The biggest impression when this ward was established was that when the Savior comes, as in Third Nephi when he came to the people of Bountiful, all the people came and they were one people—one heart, one mind, combined together—and they were his people. When the Savior comes again, it's not going to be this culture and this culture and this culture. It's going to be the gospel culture. We have this little chance to have a piece of that before the Savior comes and to actually test it.<sup>35</sup>

Once the ward was created, the challenge was to get the single adults to attend it. Isaias Rojas from Mexico had no plans to attend the singles ward when it was announced. He liked being in a family ward, and he liked his calling. But his father encouraged him to go be with other singles. Rojas recalled: "As I started attending that ward, I realized the great blessing of being in that ward. After I transferred my records, I realized that there was something special in that ward that I needed to be part of. . . . I love the people and love the spirituality that you can feel when you are in those meetings. In sacrament meeting, Sunday School, and priesthood, you can feel the Spirit strongly."<sup>36</sup>

Kylee Smith, the daughter of the Franklin First Ward bishop at the time, wondered if she should go to the singles ward because she was needed to interpret for a deaf child in the family ward. But she decided to go and was impressed. "When I first went, it was a lot of fun. There were a lot of people that I'd seen but didn't really know. I'd seen them around the neighborhood or around the stores or at girls' camp. I didn't actually know they were there. There were new people too, so that was pretty cool. I just decided to check it out. The first week I went was pretty awesome. I loved from the very beginning the elders quorum and Relief Society and bishopric and all the leaders.

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They wanted us to be accepted. They made sure everyone felt welcomed and everyone knew each other. It's really cool. We have a lot of fun."

Smith feared that the ward would break up into groups. "We were really worried that it was going to be cliquy, that it was going to be the deaf ward, the Navajo ward, the English ward, and the Spanish ward separately with no one really liking each other and no one really working together very well. But it was really cool. We're all friends. The deaf people are learning Spanish or Spanish people are learning sign language. The English people are learning both languages. The bishop is the perfect guy for it. He speaks the languages, and he's so wonderful. He is very inspiring. I really love that ward." Because she signs, Smith usually watches the interpreter, but she felt that everyone communicates well. She was impressed by how people jumped in to make sure that everyone understood what was being said.<sup>37</sup>

Embry attended the singles ward shortly after it was organized and saw some disorganization. Some of the interviewees commented about these problems when the ward first started. Sometimes interpreters were not available. Sometimes it seemed that people were caught off guard when someone spoke in Spanish.

But according to the members and the ward and other observers, those problems were overcome. Embry returned to the ward about a year later and was impressed with how organized it was. Everyone seemed to know who would sign and when they needed to use headphones. When someone spoke in Spanish, the English speakers, including the ASL interpreter, had on headsets, but the ward also provided language-specific Sunday School classes so that the ward members could communicate in their language. And there were special weekday activities so that the members could learn more than one language.

Whitney Call, a Redd Center employee, attended the ward as part of an ASL class assignment. After listening to the interviews, she knew some of the early problems in the ward. But she saw how they had been overcome. The sacrament meeting was very organized. She attended the Sunday School class for American Sign Language. The first week she was the only hearing



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person there, so she did not fully understand. But the next time there were several hearing people in attendance, and an interpreter translated for them. The Relief Society was also organized with headsets and a deaf interpreter. Call was impressed how the ward members, despite their language differences, interacted together.<sup>38</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As the Church becomes more diverse, the Provo Utah South Stake gives a model of what can take place in culturally diverse units and shows some of the strengths and weaknesses of that model. Adriana Olvera looked at the stake and its wards and commented, “I don’t think there’s a lot of relationship with the other wards. Everybody has their own bubble, their own thing. Probably the best in that sense is the singles ward.”<sup>39</sup> Richards’s hope is that the singles ward will continue to be a model. But even if separate units continue, the Provo Utah South Stake shows ways that a stake can help bring people together. The key, according to Richards, is making sure all units have the support they need either from members or service missionaries and that the specialized units, whether they are language, age, and marital status, or geographical and economically based, are given an opportunity to stand on their own and not be treated with a “condescending benevolence.” Each can be special and unique in its own ways, but “we can expect that that which unites us is greater than that which could divide us.” According to Richards, when much is expected, much is delivered.

### NOTES

1. Where there are no notes, the information comes from the authors’ personal experiences.
2. Much of the new construction was due to the efforts of the Neighborhood Housing Service and Provo City’s efforts to bring owner occupants into the pioneer neighborhoods.

## A FIRM FOUNDATION

3. Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Wards as Community* (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 2001).
4. In Salt Lake City, missionaries are called to the Inner City Project to work with Mormons and non-Mormons alike in providing basic assistance to people that live in the downtown area. For example, Embry's cousins Craig and Donna Coulson have worked with refugees to help them find housing and secure available government services. About fifteen years ago, Embry talked to Jay Haymond, who provided the same assistance. One of the reasons Richards was able to receive the assistance is that he did careful research with population results to show incomes, educational levels, crime, home values, and admission to college in the Franklin neighborhood compared to other parts of Provo.
5. Jerry and Mary Bauer oral history, interviewed by Jessie Embry, 2009, 6–7, Provo Utah South Stake Oral History Project, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. (All of the interviews cited come from this collection or the LDS Native American Oral History Project. Interviews will be identified as Provo or LDS Native American.)
6. Manuel Jesus Castillo oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, interview in process, 2008, Provo. (This interview was conducted in Spanish.)
7. Anthony and Brenda Beyal oral history, interviewed by Corey Smallcanyon, 2008, 7, LDS Native American.
8. Beyal interview, 25.
9. Randy King oral history, interviewed by Jessie Embry, 2009, 11, Provo.
10. Richardo Cetz oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, 6, Provo.
11. Paul and Katherine Brimhall oral history, interviewed by Scott Marianno, 2008, 4–5, Provo.
12. Nicolas and Gisela Mandujano oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, interview in process, Provo. (This interview was conducted in Spanish.)
13. Jairo and Blanca Juarez oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, interview in process, Provo. (This interview was conducted in Spanish.)
14. Juliana and Alfredo Cordoba oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, interview in process, Provo. (This interview was conducted in Spanish.)

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15. Adriana Olvera oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, 6–7, Provo.
16. Claudia Gosain oral history, interviewed by Mayte Company, 2008, interview in process, Provo. (This interview was conducted in Spanish.)
17. Jairo and Blanca Juarez interview.
18. Todd Roach oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 6, Provo.
19. Brimhall interview, 5.
20. Alan Cherry oral history, interviewed by Jessie Embry, 2009, 9–12, Provo.
21. Embry is currently researching the Franklin Second Ward and its forerunners. She presented a paper on that subject at the BYU Studies Symposium, March 12, 2010, Provo. Alan Groves oral history, interviewed by Corey Smallcanyon, 2009, 25–26, LDS Native American.
22. Cherry interview, 11.
23. Groves interview, 26.
24. Olvera interview, 9.
25. Isaias Rojas oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 6, Provo.
26. Sharee Small oral history, interviewed by Scott Marianno, 2008, 3, Provo.
27. Brimhall interview, 5–6.
28. Stephen Howe oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 13, Provo.
29. Rocky Steele oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 22, Provo.
30. Katherine Wistisen oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 9, Provo.
31. Beyal interview, 27.
32. Gosain interview.
33. Steele interview, 23.
34. Groves interview, 26.
35. Bryndi Cloward oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 9, Provo.
36. Rojas interview, 5.
37. Kylee Smith oral history, interviewed by David Bolingbroke, 2008, 6–7, Provo.
38. Whitney Call, conversation with Jessie Embry, January 2010.
39. Olvera interview, 10.