



The Lord has commanded missionaries, “Speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say” (D&C 100:5–6).

R. Lanier Britsch

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MISSIONS AND MISSIONARY ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

SINCE the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the missionary efforts of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have been guided and directly administered by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They make up what is called the Missionary Committee of the Church. As a group, led by the President of the Church, they give overall direction to missionary work. These fifteen men give high priority to this work. The members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles “are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world, . . . being sent out, holding the keys, to open the door by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (D&C 107:23, 35). The Twelve are assisted in their ministry by the Seventy, who “are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world” (D&C 107:25). As

R. Lanier Britsch is a professor emeritus of history, Brigham Young University.

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special witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are charged with the responsibility of taking the restored gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Every nation must receive the witness of the gospel. The Missionary Committee is very proactive. Clearly, they take missionary work very seriously, and nothing Churchwide of any significance happens without their direction and input.

The Missionary Committee carries out its work in a number of ways. They have created an action group, nicknamed “the operating piece,” called the Missionary Executive Council (MEC). Until recently this council was chaired by Elder L. Tom Perry, a senior member of the Twelve. Elder Russell M. Nelson currently chairs that council. The other members are Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Twelve, Bishop Richard C. Edgley of the Presiding Bishopric, and Elder Richard G. Hinckley of the Seventy, who serves as executive director of the Missionary Department. This council administers missionary work for the Missionary Committee and oversees the work of the Missionary Department. This council evaluates recommendations, suggestions, and observations that may be forwarded from the Missionary Department to the Missionary Committee.

The Missionary Department works under the Missionary Executive Council. The Missionary Department does not create missionary policy, although it does forward information and recommendations to the Missionary Executive Council. The Missionary Department is a service department and functions as such. That said, it would be misleading to downplay the vital importance of this large department of the Church. The services the Missionary Department performs have a vital impact on the missionary work of the Church. In addition to general oversight and support of the current 344 missions, 15 missionary training centers (MTCs), and over 20 visitors’ centers and historical sites, the Missionary Department is responsible for receiving and processing applications for all new missionaries, young and senior, male and female, proselyting and service; compilation of information regarding potential mission presidents; publication of missionary resources such as *Preach My Gospel*, the little white book titled *The*

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Missionary Handbook, and the *Mission Presidents' Handbook*; compilation and evaluation of information that may lead to the creation of new missions, consolidation of existing missions, boundary changes, and changes in complements (the number of missionaries in a given mission); proselyting and media outreach; involvement in pageants; and so forth. One of the largest annual undertakings is the seminar for new mission presidents and their wives each June. A smaller seminar is held in January for new MTC presidents and visitors' center directors. It is smaller in number of participants but still a large undertaking. Each of these responsibilities deserves our attention, but let's look first at how the Missionary Department is organized.

MISSIONARY DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION

The Missionary Department is organized with an executive director who is a Seventy. He is assisted by an indeterminate number of assistant executive directors who are General Authorities, all of whom are assigned from the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy. Currently five assistant executive directors serve. Elder Hinckley has served in the department for five years, and has been executive director for the past three years. The assistant executive directors serve from one year to several years. They are intensely busy. They each carry supervisory responsibilities in the Missionary Department. The executive director or an assistant executive director is available and on call at all times, but professional staff members in the Missionary Department who are returned mission presidents handle all but the most difficult questions that come in from the field. These brethren are called Infield Service Representatives, or IFRs.

The executive director and the assistant executive directors are supported by a compact staff of professionals. A managing director and other directors oversee the work of a number of different areas, including missionary services, proselyting, media, public programs, finances and facilities, and MTCs. A group of senior missionary couples provide much service. A retired physician oversees the medical area. He is assisted by medical missionaries—medical doctors and mental health professionals—throughout

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the world who provide medical and mental health counseling to the 52,500 missionaries now serving. The medical missionaries are not licensed to practice outside their home areas, but they advise mission presidents and missionaries regarding local physicians, hospitals, and procedures. They save the Church untold costs in health care every year.

THE CALL TO SERVE AS A MISSIONARY

With that introduction, we will now turn to the most important administrative responsibilities of the Missionary Department, the Missionary Executive Council, the Missionary Committee, and the First Presidency. First, the process of calling full-time missionaries: mission calls are initiated either by a bishop or branch president or by the prospective missionary himself or herself. Following successful interviews with appropriate ecclesiastical leaders and completion of medical and dental requirements, the missionary application is electronically forwarded to the Missionary Department. The Missionary Department reviews the applicant's information including a review of any medical issues (a team of volunteer doctors look at the medical information, such as allergies or required medications, and note such for evaluation). Each week a member of the Twelve reviews the information on each potential missionary and assigns him or her to a field of labor. The Missionary Department provides information on missions that need more missionaries, languages needed, restrictions on the applicant getting a visa to certain countries and any other information that will inform the Apostle(s) while making the mission assignments as part of the revelatory process.

An Apostle makes every assignment for missionaries, both single missionaries and couples. He can look at all of the information and override any piece of it. It doesn't matter; that is just informational for him. There may be a mission that is low on missionaries. He can look past that and assign that missionary to a mission that is over its complement. He has full discretion in where the assignments are made, and every assignment is made individually and by inspiration. They try to honor the financial and

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health constraints of couple missionaries. It takes a long time because there are hundreds a week. Assigning missionaries is rotated among the Twelve.

In April general conference of 2010, Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Seventy spoke on missionary work. His address provided specifics regarding the process followed by members of the Twelve when they assign missionaries that are not available anywhere else. The following quotation is long, but it reveals much that is highly important regarding the assigning of missionaries to their respective fields of labor:

With the encouragement and permission of President Henry B. Eyring, I would like to relate to you an experience, very special to me, which I had with him several years ago when he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. . . . Elder Eyring was assigning missionaries to their fields of labor, and as part of my training, I was invited to observe. . . .

First, we knelt in prayer. I remember Elder Eyring using very sincere words, asking the Lord to bless him to know “perfectly” where the missionaries should be assigned. The word “perfectly” said much about the faith that Elder Eyring exhibited that day.

As the process began, a picture of the missionary to be assigned would come up on one of the computer screens. As each picture appeared, to me it was as if the missionary were in the room with us. Elder Eyring would then greet the missionary with his kind and endearing voice: “Good morning, Elder Reier or Sister Yang. How are you today?”

He told me that in his own mind he liked to think of where the missionaries would conclude their mission. This would aid him to know where they were to be assigned. Elder Eyring would then study the comments from the bishops and stake presidents, medical notes, and other issues relating to each missionary.

He then referred to another screen which displayed areas and the missions across the world. Finally, as he was prompted by the Spirit, he would assign the missionary to his or her field of labor.

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From others of the Twelve, I have learned that this general method is typical each week as Apostles of the Lord assign scores of missionaries to serve throughout the world. . . .

At the end of the meeting Elder Eyring bore his witness to me of the love of the Savior, which He has for each missionary assigned to go out into the world and preach the restored gospel. He said that it is by the great love of the Savior that His servants know where these wonderful young men and women, senior missionaries, and senior couple missionaries are to serve. I had a further witness that morning that every missionary called in this Church, and assigned or reassigned to a particular mission, is called by revelation from the Lord God Almighty through one of these, His servants.¹

When the calls come back to the Missionary Department, staff members in the department prepare what is called a call packet. This call packet provides the newly called missionary with information he or she will need, including clothing requirements and travel information, to prepare for the specific mission assignment. The assignments are also immediately sent to the Travel Department, which comes under the Presiding Bishopric's Office. The Travel Department arranges transportation and visas.

THE CALLING OF MISSION PRESIDENTS

Mission presidents are called in a somewhat different manner. When General Authorities and Area Seventies visit with stake presidents at stake conferences, they suggest that the stake president might recommend two or three of the best potential mission presidents to the Missionary Department. General Authorities—the First Presidency, the Twelve, the Seventy, and Area Seventies—also see men who impress them as good candidates and bring those names back to the Missionary Department.

The Missionary Department executive directors (General Authorities) discreetly gather as much information as possible regarding each candidate's availability, health, family situation, employment and financial status, and

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doctrinal soundness. They look through these recommendations carefully and prayerfully. Most of this information comes from stake presidents. This process begins about eighteen months before the new mission presidents will enter the field. In 2010, the Church sent out 112 new mission presidents. More couples than needed are screened or backgrounded, as not all individual circumstances can be determined until a personal interview takes place. The six General Authorities in the Missionary Department look at the candidates together and then forward the files of the possible new mission presidents to the Missionary Executive Council, where they are carefully reviewed again. Those they choose to bring forward will be presented to the First Presidency and the Twelve. The Missionary Department's role is simply to help identify, screen, and move names forward.

Potential mission presidents are interviewed by a member of the Twelve. Although possible missionary service may be mentioned in this interview, the member of the Twelve does not extend the call to serve. Interviews with the Twelve reveal facts that could not be ascertained through the backgrounding process. Perhaps it was not known that one member of the couple or a dependent child has a serious health problem. Or the potential mission president's financial condition may have deteriorated. So for this reason, it is necessary for the Missionary Department to be prepared to provide a few more names than will be called. The process of gathering names of possible mission presidents by the Missionary Department and interviewing them by the Twelve is a very careful, time-consuming undertaking. By the time these individuals go through all the interviews and all of the screening and back to the First Presidency, they have been considered very carefully.

The call to serve as a mission president is extended only by the First Presidency, either in person or in some instances by telephone. When the call is extended, the couple normally is told whether they will serve in an English-speaking mission or in another language area. Calls are extended by the First Presidency beginning in mid-November. The actual assignment to a specific mission comes by letter from the First Presidency about the middle of February. The Missionary Department and the Twelve provide

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the necessary information regarding family size, which mission homes can accommodate which families, and so forth, but the First Presidency and the Twelve make all of the final decisions regarding where each couple will serve. When you realize the Presidency of the Church extends calls to over one hundred couples personally every year—they either have them in their office or talk to them over the phone—and the Twelve interview an even larger number personally, it's a daunting task. The First Presidency and the Twelve set apart mission presidents and their wives.

SEMINAR FOR NEW MISSION PRESIDENTS AND THEIR WIVES

Mission presidents are trained at the annual seminar for new mission presidents at the MTC in Provo. The Missionary Department prepares the agendas and sets everything up—housing, transportation, food, teaching schedules, arranging facilities, and so forth. Similar preparations go into the planning and implementation of the seminar for MTC presidents and visitors' center directors held in January. Elder Nelson is currently in charge. Generally, all three members of the First Presidency speak, as do several of the Twelve each year. The executive director of the Missionary Department and the five assistant executive directors teach in the classes. The seminar lasts three or four days. The classroom teachings are recorded and later sent to *all* mission presidents so they can listen to CDs and refresh their memories regarding what the Spirit conveyed and what was said. Mission presidents often understand what was meant in Provo better when they are in the thick of the work in the mission field.

One of the most important purposes of the seminar is to provide the opportunity for the new mission presidents and wives personally to be with the First Presidency and members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Mission presidents come from all over the world. Although they have spoken to the Church leaders by phone, many have never been in the same room with the President of the Church, his counselors, or the Apostles. They and their wives are able to meet these men. It is a thrill for them.

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The topics covered are basic to missionary service: the purpose of missionary work, the ministry of the mission president and his wife, missionary work in the ward, working with members, teaching by the Spirit, the faith to find, media, goal setting and planning, zone conferences, strengthening missionaries, using the Book of Mormon, and so forth. New mission presidents are also informed regarding reporting lines and to whom they should turn for guidance and assistance. (Outside North America, they report to their Area Presidency. Within the United States, they report to one of the Presidency of the Seventy.) The mission presidents have the opportunity to meet with new missionaries who are going into their mission. The entire experience is formulated to give new mission presidents and their wives the administrative knowledge and tools and spiritual thrust to lead their missions successfully.

CREATION OF *PREACH MY GOSPEL*

In my interviews, I asked if there are any particular scriptures that guide and motivate their work. The answer was not surprising: “It’s all of them! There are so very many that relate to missionary work. *Preach My Gospel* is filled with important scriptures.”² With that entrée, I asked, “Let’s talk about that. How did *Preach My Gospel* come into being?” The process was quite straightforward but remarkable all the same.

In 2002, President Gordon B. Hinckley met with the chairman of the Missionary Executive Council and asked him to find a way to get away from rote presentation and memorized lessons and teach with the Spirit. That was the charge given to the Missionary Executive Council by the President of the Church. They carried this charge to the executive directors and staff of the Missionary Department, who worked out the methods and content that eventually became *Preach My Gospel*. Thirteen missions around the world were involved to test the concepts—several overseas and the rest in the United States. They did so and gave their responses and evaluations back to the MEC. From time to time, the presidents of these missions met with the Missionary Executive Council, either in person or via telephone, to discuss

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things and this manual started to come together. It went through several drafts and did not have a title until it was finally published in English as *Preach My Gospel* in October 2004. It is a 228-page guide to missionary service. The Missionary Department immediately involved the Translation Department in preparation of language editions and by February 2005, *Preach My Gospel* was available in almost all the languages in which the Church teaches.

Preach My Gospel is a wonderful case study of how the leaders of the Church accomplish the Lord's purposes. All of the Twelve read it thoroughly and had input. The entire First Presidency of the Church read it very carefully and annotated it and made changes.

The purpose of *Preach My Gospel* is to help missionaries "speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say" (D&C 100:5–6). The primary materials missionaries now receive are *Preach My Gospel* and the little white missionary handbook. (Before that, missionaries in the MTC received an array of materials adding up to over six hundred pages.) In combination with the scriptures, these foundational documents are the teaching syllabi for all missionaries. *Preach My Gospel* has clearly filled a missionary desire in many members of the Church. Over a million copies have been distributed, and the number continues to rise.

Many here today, perhaps most, will remember earlier unified teaching plans. An in-depth paper needs to be done on the development and evolution of missionary teaching materials through the years. Before World War II, missionaries did not use a uniform plan for teaching the gospel. The doctrines taught were the same everywhere, but the manner and order of presentation and emphasis varied from missionary to missionary. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, several teaching plans were developed that the missionaries memorized. Notable among these plans was the Anderson Plan developed by Richard Lloyd Anderson and Reid Bankhead. Variations of the Anderson Plan were developed all over the world. These memorized

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plans presented the basic Mormon doctrines clearly and efficiently. I use the word *efficiently* with caution. In Hong Kong, for example, more than sixteen lessons were developed and taught. That was before baptism. They taught new members another sixteen lessons after baptism. One advantage of the memorized plans was that when missionaries were transferred, they could simply inform their replacements which lesson any contact should receive next. These systems gave missionaries a certain sense of security, even though memorization did not always come easily to every missionary. In June 1961 (the same year that the first seminar for new mission presidents was held), the Church put forward the first unified plan for teaching the gospel. It and the second unified plan that followed in the 1970s were vetted by the Missionary Department and the Missionary Committee. These plans also required memorization and a set sequence. Refinements have been made over the years. But *Preach My Gospel* is revolutionary. The Church's missionary force worldwide is now marching together with a steady, unified beat. When the elders and sisters in the Utah Salt Lake City Mission heard that they would no longer be required to memorize teaching lessons, a cheer rang out. But their mission president said, "Just a minute. This is going to be a lot harder if you do it right." The steady beat is the unified determination to listen to and teach by the power of the Holy Spirit.

MISSION SUPPORT

Support of the missions, MTCs, and visitors' centers is an enormous responsibility and undertaking that requires a staff of missionaries and professionals to accomplish. The February 13, 2010, issue of the *LDS Church News* announced assignments for new mission presidents and also the creation of new missions. Earlier in this paper I spoke of 344 missions. That information is already out of date. Because of the creation of new missions and the consolidations of existing missions in July 2010, there are 340 missions as of this writing. For those of us who read the *Church News*, this is exciting news. But for the Missionary Department, it reflects a great amount of work. Every mission has an office and a home or apartment for the mission

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president's family. Cars must be procured or sold. Boundaries must be adjusted. Missionaries must be divided up, reassigned, and sent to new cities and apartments. New arrangements must be established with local priesthood leaders, and on and on. The Missionary Department is responsible for all of this. Of course, Area Presidencies, the Presidency of the Seventy, directors of Temporal Affairs, and others are much involved, but the Missionary Department is finally responsible to make sure that each mission has the right complement and the correct borders and boundaries, and that the mission president knows which stakes are assigned to his mission and so on.

MISSIONARY TRAINING CENTERS

Currently there are fifteen MTCs—one in Provo, Utah, and the remainder outside of the United States. Each MTC has a president who is called to serve for two years. MTC presidents are all returned mission presidents. They serve with local counselors. They are, of course, called and assigned by the First Presidency. The staff of each MTC varies in size. Teachers are returned missionaries who have experience teaching *Preach My Gospel*. Teachers are kept generally no longer than two years so that teaching remains fresh. Some MTCs are so small that they have, in addition to the presidency, only one staff member and a few teachers. But, in contrast, the MTC in Provo is actually over twice the size of BYU–Hawaii and has staff of considerable size and a large annual budget. It is the third largest educational institution in the Church after BYU and BYU–Idaho. MTCs in England, Brazil, and several other countries boast physical facilities and staffs of varying sizes. The four hundred dollars a month debited from the ward account for each missionary helps to offset the expenses of the MTCs as well as costs once the missionary arrives in his or her field of labor. As is true with every other part of missionary work, the curriculum at the MTCs is carefully guided and reviewed by the Missionary Department and the Missionary Committee.

VISITORS' CENTERS

The Church currently has over twenty visitors' centers and historical sites situated near temples and other places of historical importance. Visitors' centers are led by a director who serves for two years and are staffed primarily by sister missionaries and some senior couples. The Missionary Department is responsible for all aspects of construction, reconstruction, and maintenance, development of displays and literature, preparation of dialogues, and so forth. The Church History Department provides accurate historical information and archival data to enhance the interest and effectiveness of each historical site, and in some cases staffs and manages these sites.

The most visited visitors' center is Temple Square. With more than five million visitors annually, it is the most visited tourist site in the State of Utah. (By the way, Nauvoo is the second most visited Church historical site.) Because of the number of visitors and the number of missionaries required to have it function properly, Temple Square is both a visitors' center and a mission. Mission presidents hold priesthood keys to preside over their missions. Visitors' center directors do not hold keys. But in the case of Temple Square, it is presided over by a mission president who holds priesthood keys.

MEDIA AND PAGEANTS

Under the direction of the Missionary Committee of the Church, the Missionary Department has responsibility for all Church advertising efforts. These include less-direct offerings such as Homefront ads, which for many years have featured television and radio messages that promote family-related themes, and more direct, more recent media messages that invite members of other faiths to visit www.mormon.org. In recent years the Missionary Department has created and maintains this site, which presents many positive faces of Mormonism, including video testimonies, brief but powerful excerpts from talks by the Twelve and other leaders of the Church, a section on Church beliefs, and so forth. There is even a chat feature that

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allows participants to ask questions directly to a live missionary at the Provo MTC or at visitors' centers regarding what they are seeing on their computer screens or regarding principles of the gospel. Missionaries actually teach *Preach My Gospel* lessons over the Internet. This online missionary effort has become more and more necessary as gated communities have become the norm. How else shall we get into those homes? The Internet is one part of the answer.

The Missionary Department designs and oversees development and production of all materials used in proselyting, including developing films, pamphlets, exhibits, and other forms of media. The department has also played a major role in the production of such movies as *Legacy*, *The Testaments*, *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*, and other full-length films.

Pageants also come under the direction of the Missionary Department. The Hill Cumorah, Nauvoo, Manti, Castle Valley, Clarkston, Mesa, and other large pageants receive financial aid for staging, costumes, and support. The Missionary Department writes or reviews scripts, music, and other content to be sure it is appropriate. Smaller pageants receive less financial support but have the benefit of Missionary Department review and advice.

CONCLUSION

The missionary program of the Church is so large it requires a prophet's vision to grasp its magnitude. In attempting to write a suitable conclusion, I have been almost overwhelmed by the size and complexity of what is going on. It is so large yet very personal. It spans most of the nations of the earth, yet it is so personal and so individualized that the Lord's Apostles make every missionary assignment and the First Presidency calls every mission president. The work of the Missionary Department is constant in its purpose yet fluid and ever-changing in its work. In 2010, there were 340 missions. Yet the Church organized ten new missions that year. The management skills required to implement such constant changes are very demanding.

The principal message I wish to share concerns the basic organization and administration of missionary work in the Church: the First Presidency

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and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles oversee all missionary efforts as the Missionary Committee of the Church. They have delegated to a select group, the Missionary Executive Council, the responsibility of moving important information back and forth between the Missionary Committee and the Missionary Department of the Church. The Missionary Executive Council also makes many decisions that do not require the consideration of the entire Missionary Committee. The Missionary Department has the responsibility to carry out the vision, plans, policies, and mandates of the Missionary Committee. The Missionary Department is a support team that services missionaries, mission presidents, the Area Presidencies, the Presidency of the Seventy, and the Missionary Committee. In sum, the system continues to accomplish remarkable work in the great effort to take the restored gospel to every nation and people.

NOTES

1. Ronald A. Rasband, "The Divine Call of a Missionary," *Ensign*, May 2010, 52–53.
2. This article about the administrative and organizational workings of the Missionary Department of the Church was written following interviews with personnel in that department. Early drafts of the manuscript were read by those individuals. For reasons of privacy, they have requested not to be identified.

MATERIALS FOR FURTHER STUDY

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In addition to the books and articles listed above, there are numerous articles on mission history regarding various countries in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* and the *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*.